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ABSTRACT

This curriculum unit helps teachers and students explore important murals by Mexican American artists in Los Angeles (California), examine murals from the past, and work together to make their own murals. The unit suggests questions to be considered in the classroom: Why do people make murals? Why does Los Angeles have more murals than any other U.S. city? How can artworks express a sense of belonging? and How do contemporary artists build on the work of earlier artists? The unit consists of four lessons, each of which can stand alone or be used in conjunction with the others. The unit opens with a reading, "About Mexican American Murals," that defines the conceptual framework. Seven key artworks provide the curriculum unit's foundation. Extensive questions and answers given for each of the seven murals allow teachers and students to explore the artworks in depth. The unit's four lessons are: (1) "My Place" (introduces students to the theme of place and to the format artists choose for their artworks; students make a collage that expresses their own place in the world); (2) "Influences from the Past" (introduces influences of earlier art on later art; students consider how earlier murals may have influenced contemporary Chicano murals in Los Angeles); (3) "Themes and Interpretation" (helps students evaluate interpretations of artworks; students use the theme of place to help them interpret contemporary Chicano murals); and (4) "A Mural with a Theme" (students analyze how Chicano and other mural painters have arranged parts within their murals; students plan and execute their own murals expressing the theme of place). Includes extensive resources. (BT)

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by Mary Erickson

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Mexican American Murals

Making a Place in the World

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Why do people make murals?

Why does Los Angeles have more murals than any other city in the United States?

How can artworks express a sense of belonging?

How do contemporary artists build on the work of earlier artists?

These are some of the questions you and your students can consider as you explore important murals by Mexican American artists in Los Angeles, examine murals from the past, and work together to make your own mural.

Lesson Plans: Overview and Recommended Sequence

Mexican American Murals: Making a Place in the World consists of four lessons. Each lesson can stand alone or be used in conjunction with the others. Be sure to read About Mexican American Murals to gain an understanding of the conceptual framework for the unit. Seven key artworks provide the foundation upon which the Mexican American Murals curriculum unit is based. Extensive questions and answers given for each of the key murals allow teachers and students to explore the artworks in depth.

- **My Place** introduces students to the theme of place. Students are also introduced to the format (outside shape) artists choose for their artworks. Students make a collage that expresses their own place in the world.
- **Influences from the Past** introduces influences of earlier art on later art. Students are asked to consider how earlier murals may have influenced contemporary Chicano murals in Los Angeles.
- **Themes and Interpretation** helps students evaluate interpretations of artworks. Students use the theme of place to help them interpret contemporary Chicano murals.
- **A Mural with a Theme** asks students to analyze how Chicano and other mural painters have arranged parts within their murals. Students plan and execute their own murals expressing the theme of place.

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Mexican American Murals

Making a Place in the World

Credits and Acknowledgements

Mary Erickson, professor of Art at Arizona State University, is the author of Mexican American Murals: Making a Place in the World.

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The following teachers taught activities from lessons and collected samples of student work that appear in the lessons: Christine Rose of Glendale School District in Glendale, California; Bonnie Hansen, Ellen Hall, and Susan Birney of the San Marino School District in San Marino, California; Patricia Johnson and Susan Raymond of Paradise Valley School District in Phoenix, Arizona; and Roxanna May-Thayer of Phoenix Union High School District, Phoenix, Arizona.

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Linda Crain, kindergarten teacher in Lynnwood School District in Orange County, California, proposed ideas for primary children as well as interdisciplinary ideas.

Faith Clover, visiting assistant professor of art at Arizona State University, reviewed the lessons and offered insights into the structure of unit plans for Worlds of Art.

Mary Elizabeth Parris, art education graduate student at Arizona State University, assembled and drafted information about Chicano murals.

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Electronic and Other Resources

Note: Due to the dynamic nature of the Internet, some sites listed here may no longer be available.

Chicano Art

Judith Baca's Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine
http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/murals/Sparc/baca.html

Judith Baca's Olympic Champions, 1948-1964, Breaking Barriers
http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/cgibin/websql/~getty/image.hts?name=image6

Yreina Cervántez's La Ofrenda/The Offering
http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/murals/Sparc/ofrenda.html

Detail of Frank Romero painting Going to the Olympics with a broom
http://www.lamurals.org/MCLA/MuralFiles/Downtown/GoingToTheOlympics.html

A Detailed Interpretation of Frank Romero's Going to the Olympics
http://www.ci.la.ca.us/tourist/olympics.htm

Frank Romero's Freeway Wars
http://www.artcity.com/gr/FrankRomero.html

Robert Berman Gallery (represents Frank Romero)
http://www.artcity.com/gr/ROBERTBERMANGALLERY.html

George Yepes's Mujer del Este de Los Angeles/Lady of the Eastside (view of site)
http://www.lamurals.org/MCLA/MuralFiles/ELA/LadyOfEastside.html

Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC)
http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/murals/Sparc/SPARC.html

SPARC's Chicano Mural Tour of L.A.
http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/murals/Sparc/sparctour.html

A Brief History of Chicano Murals in L.A.
http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/murals/Sparc/muralhis.html

Posters of Mexican American Artworks
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Maps/mex.html

Chicana and Chicano Space: Artworks and Lesson Plans
http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/

Galería Sin Fronteras, Austin, Texas
http://clnet.ucr.edu/murals/sinfronteras/

Body/Culture: Chicano Figuration, Exhibition at Sonoma State University Art Gallery
http://www.sonoma.edu/ArtGallery/Chicano/

Chicana/Chicano Art Images, Stanford University
http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/#anchor618055

Self Help Graphics
http://www.selfhelpgraphics.com

Galería Las Americas, Los Angeles
http://www.latinoweb.com/temp/galeria.html

Chicano Murals in Tucson
http://www.library.arizona.edu/images/folkarts/murals.html

Latino Art and Culture
http://www.art.unt.edu/ntieva/artcurr/latino/index.htm

Jaclyn Lopez Garcia
http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/students/glasshouses/

Carmen Lomas Garza
http://tlaloc.sfsu.edu/~clgarza/

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Castillo, R. G., T. McKenna, and Y. Yarbro-Bejarano (1991). CARA: Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation. Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery.

Cockcroft, E. S., and H. Barnet-Sánchez, eds. (1993). Signs from the Heart: California

Chicano Murals. Venice, California: SPARC; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Colburn, B. (1995). Across the Street: Self Help Graphics and Chicano Art in Los Angeles. Laguna Beach, California: Laguna Art Museum. Great Wall of Los Angeles slide narrative (1983). Venice, California: SPARC.

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Los Angeles and Southern California Murals

Murals Conservancy of Los Angeles
http://www.lamurals.org/index.html

Robin Dunitz's Street Gallery: Guide to 1000 Los Angeles Murals
http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/murals/dunitz/Street-G.html

Muralart.com
http://www.muralart.com/links.html

Dunitz, R. J. (1993). Street Gallery: Guide to 1000 Los Angeles Murals. Los Angeles: RJD Enterprises.

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Bonampak Murals

Site and Wall Paintings
http://www.mexicodesconocido.com.mx/indigena/bonampak.htm

Maya Hieroglyphic Writing
http://www.halfmoon.org/writfork.html

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Mexican Muralists: Los Tres Grandes

José Clemente Orozco Murals
http://www.spin.com.mx/ilustrado/murales/jcorozco.html

José Clemente Orozco's Hidalgo
http://www.mit.edu:8001/activities/clubmex-home/Pint/JCOHidalgo1939.html

Diego Rivera's Revolt and The New Religion
http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/html_pages/rivera2.html

Diego Rivera Virtual Museum
http://www.diegorivera.com/diego_home_eng.html

More Diego Rivera Murals
http://exchange.coa.edu/HEJourney/polcom/thomas/Virtualmuseum/riveraexhibit.html

Diego Rivera Murals in Mexico
http://www.spin.com.mx/ilustrado/murales/drivera.html

David Alfaro Siqueiros's Mural de Chapultepec
http://www.mit.edu:8001/activities/clubmex-home/Pint/DASMuraldeCHAP.html

David Alfaro Siqueiros Murals
http://www.spin.com.mx/ilustrado/murales/dasiqueiros.html

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Rochfort, D. (1993). Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros. New York: Universe.

Maynard Dixon and Depression-Era Arts Projects

Information about and Additional Artworks by Maynard Dixon
http://www.binggallery.com/dixon.html

Depression-Era New Deal Arts Projects
http://www.nara.gov/exhall/newdeal/newdeal.html

American Indian Murals in Washington, D.C.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPlate/1998-05/28/164l-052898-idx.html

Hagerty, D. J. (1993). Desert Dreams: The Art and Life of Maynard Dixon. Layton, Utah: Peregrine Smith.

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Murals from Other Cultures and Eras

Australian Cave Paintings
http://colophon.com/gallery/minsky/auscave.htm

Paleolithic Cave Paintings in France
http://www.culture.fr/culture/arcnat/chauvet/en/gvpda-d.htm

Bison Cave Painting at Altamira, Spain
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Images/P/bison.html

Lascaux Cave Paintings
http://sunsite.queensu.ca/memorypalace/parlour/caves/lascaux.html

Fifteenth-Century B.C.E. Egyptian Mural of Fowling in the Marshes
http://www.tulane.edu/lester/text/Ancient.World/Egypt/Egypt67.html

Additional Egyptian Wall Paintings
http://www.tulane.edu/lester/text/Ancient.World/Egypt/Egypt.html

Minoan Bull-Leaping Mural
http://www.tulane.edu/lester/text/Ancient.World/Minos/Minos30.html

Other Minoan Frescoes
http://www.dilos.com/region/crete/knos_pct.html

Roman Mural of Woman on Throne
http://www.tulane.edu/lester/text/Western.Architect/Rome/Rome107.html

Murals from Pompeii
http://www.tulane.edu/lester/text/Western.Architect/Pompeii/Pompeii.html

Fifth- and Sixth-Century Indian Murals at Ajantha
http://www.webindia.com/artindia/ajantha.htm

More Ajantha Murals
http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jsa3/362/ajanta2.html

Twelfth- through Sixteenth-Century Danish Church Murals
http://www.folkekirken.dk/Leksikon/FRESCO/Fresco-eng.htm

Fourteenth-Century Yugoslavian Murals
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ikon/chora8.gif

Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper
http://metalab.unc.edu/wm/paint/auth/vinci/lastsupp.jpg

Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel Ceiling
http://www.michelangelo.com/buon/bio-index2.html

Michelangelo's Last Judgement
http://www.michelangelo.com/buon/bio-index2.html

Political Murals in Northern Ireland
http://www2.ulst.ac.uk/services/library/ni/murals/murals.htm

Student Murals Mural by Paul Botello and Boyle Heights High School Students in Los Angeles
http://www.getty.edu/gri/public/LLLK/sites/boyleheights/14mural.html

Fee of the Meadow People Mural by Liza Bergman and Estrella Middle School Students in Phoenix, Arizona
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Erickson/Place/Image/meadow.html

Tile Mural by Mary Sheridan and Pickerington, Ohio, Elementary Students
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Images/Ecology/tree.html

Artworks with Interesting Formats

Katsushika Hokusai's Eagle in a Snowstorm
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Maps/eagle.html

Kicking Bear's The Battle of Little Bighorn
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Maps/battle.html

Codex Borbonicus
http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/new_ccs/html_pages/unkn4.html

Diego Rivera's Revolt and The New Religion
http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/html_pages/rivera2.html

Chumash Indians Rock Paintings
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Maps/chumash.html

Albert Bierstadt
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Images/P/yosemite.html

Dolores Huerta
http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/resources/ed_lesson_plans/famous/huerta.html#Backg

Fresco History and Technique
http://www.artswire.org/Community/afmadams/afm/howto.html

Dorothea Lange
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Images/Ecology/jobless.html

Thomas Moran
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Images/Ecology/hot.html

José Guadalupe Posada
http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/html_pages/posada9.html

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Goetzmann, W. H., and W. N. Goetzmann (1986). The West of the Imagination. New

York: W.W. Norton.

Kahn, D. and D. Neumier (1985). Cultures in Contention. Seattle: Real Comet Press.

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Mexican American Murals

Making a Place in the World

About Mexican American Murals

Mexican American Murals: Making a Place in the World is a unit within the curriculum resource Worlds of Art. The unit consists of four lesson plans that focus on Chicano muralists living and working in Los Angeles, the theme of place, and influences from the past on our lives today.

Mexican American Murals uses a discipline-based approach to art education; the lessons are interdisciplinary, thematic, and inquiry based. Each lesson can stand alone or be used in conjunction with the others.

- Mexican American Murals Unit Theme
- Mexican American Murals Key Inquiry Questions
- Los Angeles Connections
- Interdisciplinary Connections
- Invitation to Contribute Student Work

Mexican American Murals Unit Theme

We all need to belong somewhere.

Most people have a place where they eat and sleep and spend time with their families. This home place is located somewhere, on a plain or mountain, in a forest or desert, by a lake or river, or even on an ocean. Many people live in apartments or houses in neighborhoods within towns or cities, while others live away from cities in the countryside. Most homes stay in one spot, but some move with their residents as they travel from place to place.

Each of us needs more than a physical place to shelter us from the weather. We also need a place among people. We each have our place in our family, among our friends, in the community, and within a culture. Throughout our lives we can change our place among people, just as we can move from one physical place to another. Artworks can express a sense of belonging by showing how people have found their place both in the physical world and within groups of people.

Art can give us an image of our place in the world.

Mexican American Murals Key Inquiry Questions

Mexican American Murals addresses three key inquiry questions:

1. Formal Organization: How are parts organized within artworks?
2. Influence: How do earlier artworks influence later artworks?
3. Theme: What general ideas help explain artworks?

These three key inquiry questions guide the formulation of objectives within the unit's lessons. Activities within the lessons follow through on the questions. Assessment guides provide structure for determining whether your students have come to understand the questions.

As students learn how to use these three inquiry questions to guide their understanding of murals, they can transfer that ability not only to their viewing of and reflecting on any artwork they might wish to more fully understand but also to their own art making.

Los Angeles Connections

Latinos are the largest ethnic population in the city of Los Angeles. They trace their cultural heritage to the diverse cultures of Mexico, Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and the Philippines.

Mexicans founded Los Angeles in 1781; it remained a part of Mexico until the Mexican American War of 1846-48. Americans of Mexican heritage (Mexican Americans, or Chicanos) have always been an important part of the Los Angeles area population. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Chicano civil rights movement strove to overcome more than a century of discrimination. Out of that movement came the Chicano cultural renaissance, which resulted in a proliferation of artistic production, including the creation of several of the murals in this unit.

Los Angeles has been called the mural capital of the United States. Thousands of such artworks adorn buildings, walls, and freeways throughout the metropolitan area. Six of the seven key artworks in this unit are in Los Angeles County. Four of the murals were painted recently by well-known Mexican American muralists. A famous Mexican artist painted another in Pomona, California, in 1930; a California-born European American painted one in Canoga Park in 1942. A seventh mural, a Maya work, was painted more than twelve centuries ago in what is now southern Mexico.

Interdisciplinary Connections

The main focus of Mexican American Murals is learning in art. In addition, learning in a number of other content areas is addressed in specific lessons. **My Place** includes social science content and offers supplementary geography, history, and language arts activities. **Influences from the Past** includes history content and offers a history extension activity. **Themes and Interpretation** includes critical-thinking content and offers coordinated language arts activities. **A Mural with a Theme** includes social science content.

You may wish to consult the California Frameworks, which lists standards in various content areas, in order to build additional interdisciplinary connections.

Invitation to Contribute Student Work

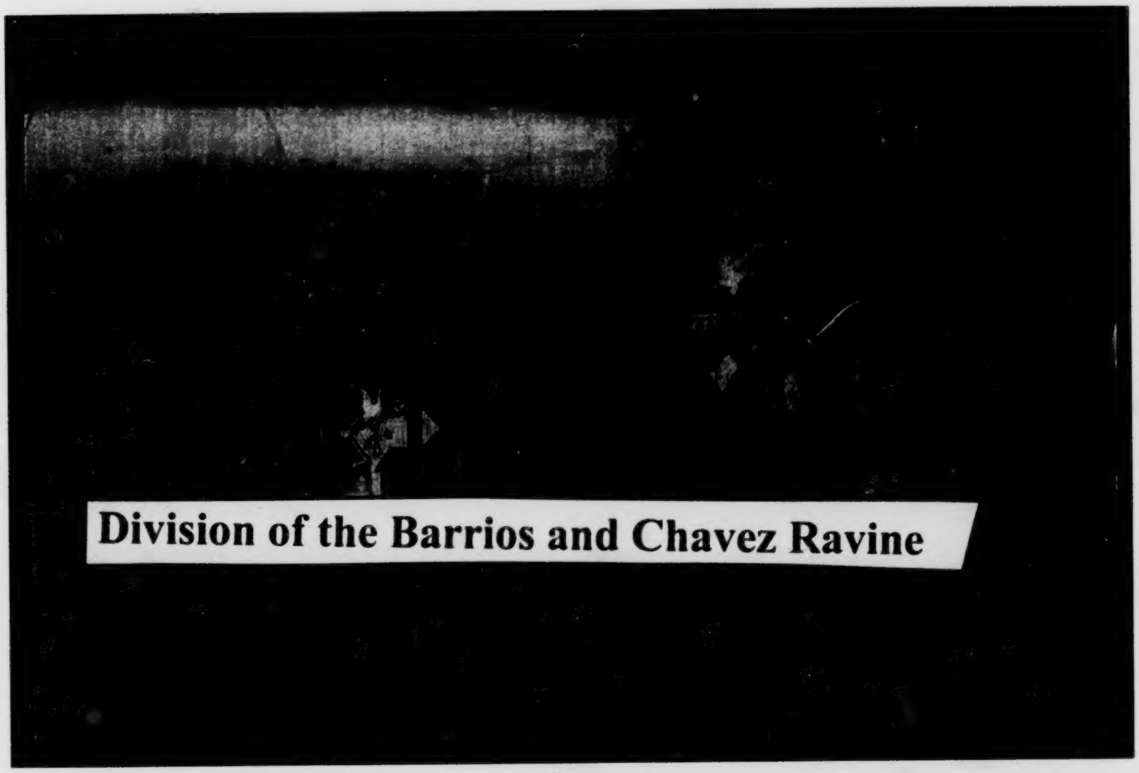
As you view the Mexican American Murals lesson plans you will notice that samples of student work are available for some of the activities. Would you like to try one of the lessons and submit samples of your students' work?

Here's what to do:
Send a message to us at artsednet@getty.edu with a URL of your own or your school's Web site where relevant lesson plans and student work are posted.

Key Artworks

Seven key artworks provide the foundation upon which the Mexican American Murals curriculum unit is based. Four of the murals are by contemporary artists living and working in Los Angeles; the other three artworks are by influential precursors. Extensive questions and answers given for each of the key murals allow teachers and students to explore the artworks in depth.

Judith Baca, Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine
Yreina Cervántez, La Ofrenda (The Offering)
Frank Romero, Going to the Olympics
George Yepes, Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside)
Unknown Maya Art Maker(s), Presentation of the Heir
José Clemente Orozco, Prometheus
Maynard Dixon, Palomino Ponies


Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine

Judith Baca, Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine
http://www.sparcmurals.org/present/cmt/jb.html

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Mexican American Murals
Making a Place in the World

Key Artwork: Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine

Judith Francisca Baca
b. 1946
Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine (detail of The Great Wall of Los Angeles)
1983 (whole mural 1976-83)
acrylic
13 x 35 ft. (whole mural 13 x 2,235 ft.)
Tujunga Wash, San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles

This image appears on SPARC's Los Angeles Murals Home Page. On their Web site you can see a small reproduction of Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine together with a part of the next section of the mural to the right.

The mural is also reproduced in Lucy R. Lippard's Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990) and, also with part of the next mural section on the right, in Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals, edited by Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sánchez (Venice, California: SPARC; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

Possibly the longest mural in the world, Chicana artist Judith Baca's The Great Wall of Los Angeles was painted by inner-city youth along half a mile of the San Fernando Valley's Tujunga Wash between 1976 and 1983. Forty panels stretching along a cement-lined flood channel show the history of the peoples of Los Angeles. Included is Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine, which shows how the building of freeways and Dodger Stadium tore apart neighborhoods, including the long-established Mexican American community of Chavez Ravine. Not only did Baca manage the colossal undertaking of painting the mural, she also created a moving testimony to the forgotten past of one of the nation's most multicultural cities.

The information below provides extensive information about this monumental mural, which looks at the "complex interplay of races and cultures that have contributed to California's history." (Great Wall of Los Angeles slide narrative, 1983)

Information about the Art Maker or Artwork

What can I find out about the art maker or artwork?

Art Maker

Who made the artwork? What are the circumstances of the art maker's life?

Judith Baca, born in Los Angeles in 1946, was reared in a strong female household. She earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in art from California State University, Northridge, in 1969 and 1979, respectively. She participated in an intensive course in mural techniques at the Taller Siqueiros in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1977. Baca has been on the faculties of the University of California, Irvine, and California State University, Monterey Bay. She is a founding faculty member of the César E. Chávez Center at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Baca has been the artistic director of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, California, since 1981. She is the artistic director and founder of the Great Walls Unlimited Mural Project as well as the creator and director of the Citywide Mural Project. She is responsible for the production of 250 murals throughout Los Angeles.

Baca's one-woman shows have been seen in California, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Washington, D.C., New York, and Illinois as well as Canada and Mexico. World Wall: A Vision of the Future Without Fear, a three-hundred-foot traveling mural, has been exhibited in Venice, California; Washington, D.C.; Joensuu, Finland; and Moscow. Her work has been reviewed in such publications as the Los Angeles Times, Public Art Review, Artweek, Leonardo, American Art, Southwest Art, Art News, the New York Times, Life Magazine, Art in America, Ms. Magazine, and Newsweek as well as on television.

Baca has received awards or certificates of achievement from California Governor Pete Wilson, Los Angeles Mayor Richard J. Riordan, President Ronald Reagan, the Korean Daily News, the National Art Education Association, and the City of San Francisco.

Subject Matter

What subject matter (people, places, or things) does the artwork depict, if anything?

Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine is one section of a very long mural that depicts the history of California from prehistoric times to the late twentieth century. This segment depicts the way freeways divided families and long-standing neighborhoods within Los Angeles. On the left appear a Chicano man and boy encircled by a freeway loop. The boy's arms are folded across his chest. The man rests his right hand on the boy's shoulder and extends his left hand out toward three people encircled by another loop of freeway to the right. The second freeway loop encircles three figures, a young man and woman and a girl. The girl looks at the viewer while the man and woman look across the gap toward the figures in the other loop. The male figure crosses his arms while the woman reaches out toward the hand of the man reaching from the other loop. Between the freeway loops and behind the woman's head, chickens take flight as the pillars supporting the freeways break through the roofs of houses.

The background of Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine is a scene of hills and a twilight sky. On the hill to the right, a small female figure points to a form descending from the stars, a baseball stadium with a field, decks of seats, and bright lights. To the right of the stadium appears a grimacing, pink-cheeked policeman carrying away a girl with long braids. She yells to the people surrounded by freeways, her fists upraised. The Walking Tour and Guide to the Great Wall of Los Angeles identifies the curved yellow form to the left of the policeman as a bulldozer's blade. (Baca, 1984, p. 13)

Technical Features

How was the artwork made? (tools, materials, and processes)

More than three hundred ethnically diverse young people (ages fourteen to twenty-one) from lower-income families in Los Angeles worked on The Great Wall of Los Angeles from 1976 to 1983. Historians, poets, and artists were involved in establishing the mural's fifty themes, one of which is Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine. Painting the mural took seventy-five thousand person hours and seven hundred gallons of paint under the supervision of forty artists.

Workers and artists sand- and water-blasted the concrete and primed it with white gesso. They used chalk to draw grids; cartoons (preliminary drawings) drawn by the artists were projected onto the grids. Next, they painted a second undercoat using magenta paint, which helped blend the colors painted over it and provided a darker and less noticeable undercolor for bubbles in the cement. Artists painted base colors unique to each panel, filled in the dark colors, and applied highlight colors last. They used a half-dry brush in a technique called "scumbling" to let the undercolors show through.

Sensory Elements

What visual elements do I see in the artwork? (line, color, shape, light and dark, texture, mass, and space)

Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine has many shades of blue, purple, and red as well as areas of tan or yellow. The forms are dramatically modeled with gradual changes from light to dark to create a strong illusion of three-dimensional mass. Shapes are outlined with black lines.

Formal Organization

How do the elements in the artwork work together? (For example, are parts repeated, balanced, emphasized, contrasted?)

In Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine, Baca has achieved a dramatic composition by contrasting organic, curvilinear shapes (such as the draped fabric in the girl's red dress) with severe geometric ones (such as the freeway loops and the stadium, with its rays of light). The dominance of reds, purples, and blues unify the composition.

Reproduction

How is the reproduction (digitized or printed image) different from the original artwork? (size, angle of view, surface texture, etc.)

Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine is only one of forty sections of a mural that is over half a mile long, making it perhaps the longest mural in the world. In comparison, the on-line image is very small and many details are not visible. The posted image includes part of the next panel of the mural to the right of Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine.

The mural is painted below ground level on the side of a cement flood channel. Viewers can catch glimpses of the mural as they drive on a major street that parallels the channel or they can park and walk the half-mile-long park between the street and the wash. Because the mural is outdoors, it looks different as lighting conditions change throughout the day and year. Chain-link fences stand at both edges of the wash, so only taller viewers can see the mural completely unobstructed.

Condition

What condition (broken, restored, dirty) is the artwork in? How did it look when it was new?

SPARC maintains The Great Wall of Los Angeles. After the mural was completed, it was covered with a clear acrylic sealer to help protect it. The mural was flooded five times between 1976 and 1983. However, air pollution is a greater threat to the mural than flooding. Because the complete mural, is nearly half a mile long, several days are required to check its condition.

Contextual Information

What can I find out about when and where the artwork was made?

Natural Context

What is the natural environment like where the artwork was made? (for example, climate, landforms, natural resources)

Judith Baca, in explaining how The Great Wall of Los Angeles relates to its natural environment, has said: "One of the most catastrophic consequences of an endless real estate boom was the concreting of the entire Los Angeles River, on which the city was founded. The river, as the earth's arteries-thus atrophied and hardened-created a giant scar across the land which served to further divide an already divided city. It is this metaphor that inspired my own half-mile-long mural on the history of ethnic peoples painted in the Los Angels River conduit." (Dunitz and Prigoff, 1997)

The climate of the San Fernando Valley is dry, with mild winters and hot summers. Temperatures in the summer, when the mural was painted, sometimes rise above a hundred degrees. The area is prone to flash flooding after rains. One flash flood during the painting of The Great Wall of Los Angeles washed away scaffolding and $20,000 worth of equipment.

Functional Context

How is/was the artwork used?

Baca's "goal was to tell the story of California's ethnic groups-their contributions and their struggles to overcome obstacles and stories often overlooked in classroom textbooks and television documentaries....The Great Wall offers an unique glimpse backward in time and a look at the complex interplay of races and cultures that have contributed to California's history." (Great Wall of Los Angeles slide narrative, 1983)

The mural has also had a social function. "The Great Wall is far more than a series of murals in a flood control channel. It is a tool for multicultural cooperation. Baca refers to the project as a 'tolerance-matrix,' for its creation is a mirror of the manner in which the city developed in the past, and a model for Los Angeles in the year 2000—and beyond." (Levick, 1988, p. 87)

A sixteen-year-old mural maker who worked on The Great Wall of Los Angeles wrote:

> When I started working here I did it for the money, then I began to

> take great pride in the mural and in the Chicano section in particular. At first I didn't think an assortment of races could work together because in my neighborhood there is primarily one race. This project made me realize that the prejudices I had inside me were not only false but also ignorant. I only wish all mankind could have gone through this experience with me. I regret that when I leave here my new attitude will change back to before. I hope that when people see this mural they forget all their prejudices and try to live with all people, no matter what race, in peace. (Baca, 1984, p. 18)

Cultural Context

What can I determine about what people thought, believed, or did in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Mexicans founded Los Angeles in 1781. They remained the primary residents of Los Angeles until the Mexican American War (1846-48), when the United States annexed California. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Mexicans became a socially ostracized, economically subordinated, and increasingly less demographically significant racial minority group.

Around 1900, large numbers of Mexican immigrants began moving into the Los Angeles area, and many settled in what came to be known as East Los Angeles. The new immigrants found themselves the victims of various forms of racial discrimination. They faced segregation in housing, education, and public accommodations and were relegated to low-paying, menial jobs. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, anti-immigrant forces joined federal and local officials who sought to find scapegoats for the city's massive unemployment problem. They deported nearly one-third of Los Angeles's population of Mexican descent, including many American-born children of immigrants.

The period around World War II saw Mexican Americans confronting overt racial attacks. European American city officials and police were alarmed by increasingly hostile Mexican American youths, who broadcast their defiance by wearing fashionable zoot suits. As a result, there were mass arrests of such youths (as many as six hundred in one weekend) after the infamous Sleepy Lagoon Trial and the Zoot Suit riots of June 1943.

The zoot suit crisis helped spark the Mexican American civil rights movement in Los Angeles. Organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Community Service Organization helped sweep away most of the overtly segregationist policies and even achieve a modicum of political representation. Subtler forms of discrimination remained, however, especially in the areas of jobs and education.

The Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s emerged to address these problems and to instill a sense of pride in Chicano heritage and culture that had been undermined by assimilationist educational and social policies. (The terms Mexican Americans and Chicanos are synonyms, but the latter designation usually expresses more ethnic pride and political activism.) Inspired by the United Farm Workers union and other groups, Chicano political activists gained many important victories during the era. At the same time, the movement spawned a cultural renaissance in the areas of literature, music, and the visual arts that combined aesthetics with sociopolitical concerns.

When The Great Wall of Los Angeles was painted in the San Fernando Valley between 1976 and 1983, much of the suburb was populated by European Americans. However, Mexican Americans have long lived in areas such as Pacoima, and the Valley has become more diverse in the years since the mural was painted. "The muralists were young people from various ethnic communities in [urban] Los Angeles, some of whom were recruited through the juvenile justice system and given the choice between reform school and mural painting." (Lippard, 1990, p. 171) Some of the mural makers were gang members. Baca used her negotiation skills to gain safe passage of youth through the "turf" of rival gangs and to convince hostile muralists to work together.

Artworld Context

What can I learn about the art ideas, beliefs, and activities that were important in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine is an example of the cultural renaissance that emerged from the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Many Chicano artists adopted the mural format because it harkened back to the great Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco and because it was a form of public art through which the artists' political message would have the widest audience. Baca studied at the Taller Siqueiros in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 1977. (See Electronic and Other Resources for artworks by and information about the Mexican Muralists.)

Baca has stated that for her "the very process of making the Great Wall was art because in the process a single creative vision was carried out, a vision that was both inclusive of other artistic expressions and was a people's retelling of their own history." (Great Wall of Los Angeles slide narrative, 1983) According to Baca, artists "have a responsibility to use each other as sources. Because the sources of art making in particular have been commandeered into the service of the dominant culture, we end up paying homage to that culture.... We are forging a new way, reasserting our voices, redefining language, to make ourselves present. We have to use other sources—and we are those sources." (Lippard, 1990, p. 195)

Viewpoints for Interpretation

What can I find out about what the artwork meant to people when and where it was made and what it means to people now?

Art Maker

Why did the art maker want the artwork to look the way it does?

In describing her mural, Baca has stated: "I envisioned a long narrative of another history of California; one which included ethnic peoples, women and minorities who were so invisible in conventional textbook accounts. The discovery of the history of California's multi-cultured peoples was a revelation to me as well as to members of my teams. We learned each new decade of history in summer installments. . . . Each year our visions expanded as the images traveled down the wall." (Baca, 1990, inside cover)

A fourteen-year-old mural maker of The Great Wall of Los Angeles states that "To me the mural means a piece of art, it means workmanship among others, it means a part of ourselves, also making new friends, doing a good job and having lots of fun." (Baca, 1984, p. 18)

Artworld Viewer

How did the person(s) for whom the artwork was made (for example, a patron, user, or other viewer of the time) understand it?

In 1981 Carrie Rickey wrote in Art in America: "The most amazing aspect of the Great Wall is the way it telescopes Southern California history, showing the significance of various indigenous and immigrant ethnic groups. It is a monumentally scaled history painting depicting the panorama of events that contributed to Los Angeles' distinctive profile." (Baca, 1984, p. 4) Also in 1981, Kay Mills wrote in Ms Magazine: "The 'Great Wall of Tujunga Wash' has the same heroic pioneer types you see in your local post office, but often their skins are brown or black." (Baca, 1984, p. 8)

"Division of the Barrios & Chavez Ravine reveals the human consequences of various political decisions made by elite forces in Los Angeles. The construction of a freeway for the benefit of suburban commuters split a long-established Chicano community in two, fostering family disruption and frustration and generally diluting the historical stability and cohesion of that community.

"The 1958 move of the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles similarly wreaked social and emotional havoc on the Chicano neighborhood. City powers constructed Dodger Stadium in Chaves Ravine, bringing enormous profits to Dodger owners, doubtless a far greater concern than the resulting dislocation for the Chicano residents of the area. Once again Baca has used the power of mural art to reveal the political and human realities concealed by the glitz of LA's entry into major league baseball." (Von Blum, 1991, pp. 73-74)

Cultural Understanding

How was the artwork understood within the culture in which it was made?

According to a Los Angeles Times editorial of August 24, 1983, the mural is important for the city. "Only rarely can an art project teach so much, not only to viewers but also to the young people down there in the ditch, learning and painting the summer away." (Baca, 1984, p. 12)

Chicano viewers are likely to understand Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine as a protest against the destruction of part of its long heritage by "urban renewal" policies. Judith Baca has stated that "our people are internal exiles. To affirm that as a valid experience, when all other things are working against it, is a political act. That's the time we stop being Mexican-Americans and start being Chicanos.... If you deny the presence of another people and their culture and you deny them traditions, you are basically committing cultural genocide." (Kahn and Neumier, 1985, p. 63)

Other Viewpoints

Are there other people's viewpoints you want to consider? If so, whose?

Among the many groups who might have enlightening viewpoints on Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine are the people who drive or walk by The Great Wall of Los Angeles every day, present or former residents of the Chavez Ravine area, and Dodgers fans.

Connections among Artworks

What can I find out about connections between this artwork and other artworks?

Style

How does this artwork look like other artworks?

Because the Great Wall of Los Angeles was completed a section at a time with different mural makers each summer, there are stylistic variances within the mural itself. The mural shares characteristics with paintings of the Mexican muralists, especially those of Siqueiros, as well as Works Progress Administration murals in the United States. Many such public artworks depict locally significant, historical subject matter in a readable, narrative style.

Influence

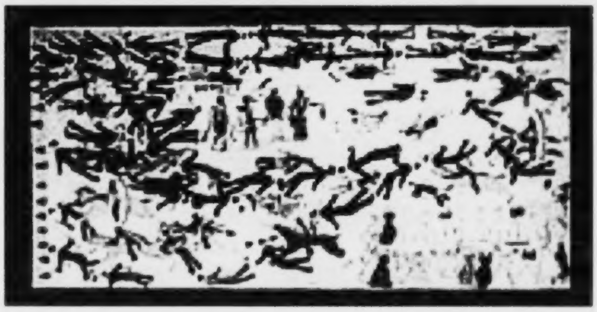
How did earlier artworks influence this artwork? How did/might it influence later artworks?

According to Lucy Lippard, Judith Baca's work, like that of other Chicano artists, has been influenced by the work of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and especially David Alfaro Siqueiros. The triangular framework underlying the overall composition of The Great Wall of Los Angeles is based on compositional principles Baca learned from Siqueiros. In addition, Baca's work has roots in Mexican and Mexican American popular arts, including two of the visual subcultures of Los Angeles—tattooing and graffiti. (Lippard, 1990, p. 170)

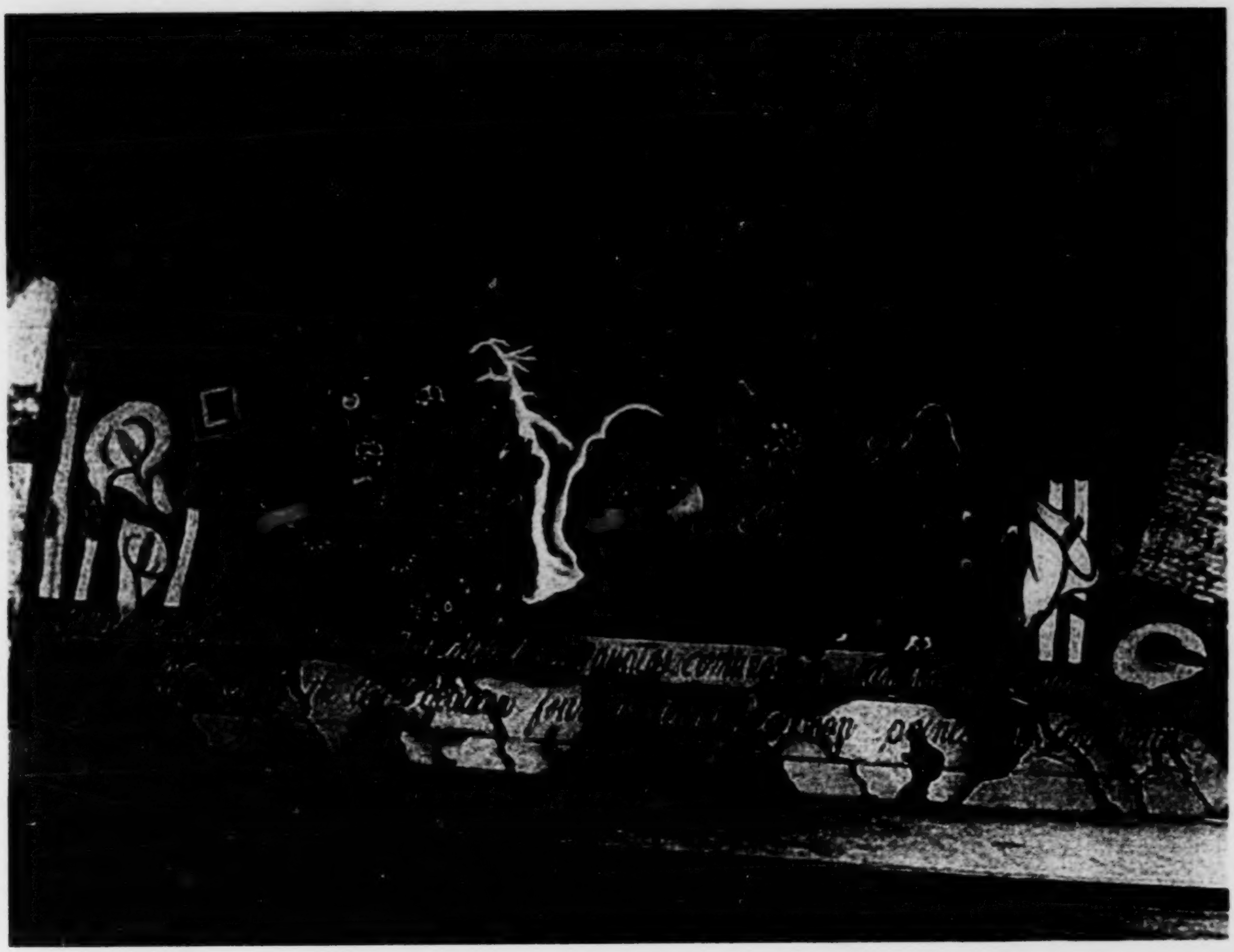
Themes

What general ideas help connect this artwork to other artworks?

The theme of history painting unifies The Great Wall of Los Angeles with works by many Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical, and nineteenth-century European artists as well as with artworks from other cultures, such as fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Islamic miniature painting and the Lakota artist Kicking Bear's depiction of the Battle of Little Big Horn. http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Maps/battle.html



Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine express a theme of protest shared by many other artists, including Francisco Goya, Los Tres Grandes (Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Siqueiros), and many contemporary artists, including Sue Coe.



Yreina Cervántez, La Ofrenda (The Offering)

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Mexican American Murals
Making a Place in the World

Key Artwork: La Ofrenda (The Offering)

Yreina Cervántez
b. 1952
La Ofrenda (The Offering)
1989
acrylic
16 x 52 ft.
Toluca Street under the First Street Bridge, Los Angeles

This mural by the Chicana artist Yreina Cervántez is an offering to the community that lives and works near downtown Los Angeles. An homage to the heroism of Latinas like Dolores Huerta, who cofounded the United Farm Workers union with César Chávez, La Ofrenda (The Offering) is in the tradition of retablos, Mexican folk paintings on wood or tin that document in pictures and words a miraculous occurrence, such as delivery from danger or recovery from illness. The artwork is a celebration of everyday life, hard work, and the central role that all women play as "forgers of the future/building every day/a new tomorrow." (from Mujer [Woman] by Sara Martinez)

The links below provide extensive information about the imagery, history, and key issues of La Ofrenda (The Offering).

Information about the Art Maker or Artwork

What can I find out about the art maker or artwork?

Art Maker

Who made the artwork? What are the circumstances of the art maker's life?

Yreina Cervántez was born in 1952 in Garden City, Kansas, but grew up near San Diego, California. She received a B.A. in Fine Arts from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and an M.F.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles. Cervántez is a painter, printmaker, and teacher and worked as the multicultural coordinator at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery from 1990 to 1993. She has taught at various institutions, including Santa Ana College; California State University, Los Angeles; the University of California, Santa Barbara; the University of California, Irvine; the University of California, Berkeley; Golden West College; and Rancho Santiago College. Her work has been exhibited in many shows across California as well as in Texas, Washington, D.C., Tijuana, and Mexico City. She received the Vesta Award in visual arts in 1991 from the Women's Building organization.

Cervántez worked with artist Judith Baca on The Great Wall of Los Angeles and as an artist in residence at Self Help Graphics. Claudia Escobedo, Erick Montenegro, Vladimir Morales, and Sonia Ramos assisted Cervántez in painting La Ofrenda.

Subject Matter

What subject matter (people, places, or things) does the artwork depict, if anything?

La Ofrenda has two different levels of imagery—a large bottom band, which is about one-third of the mural, and the area from this band to the top. The bottom band stretches across the entire mural and includes silhouettes of people running in various positions through an abstract spray-painted space. Layered across this band are two cursive lines of text in Spanish and in English, lines from a poem by Los Angeles writer Gloria E. Alvarez: "Cruzamos 'la linea' entre las cuatro direcciones, puntos comunes en caminatas largas" (We cross 'the line' between four directions, common points on long paths).

At the very top of the mural there is a bannerlike ribbon that runs the width of the artwork. This banner has writing in three sections. On the left side in cursive is "A Neighborhood Pride Program," in the middle, La Ofrenda, and to the right, "Yreina Cervántez, assisted by Claudia Escobedo, Erick Montenegro, Vladimir Morales, and Sonia Ramos."

The main body of the mural is full of imagery. The following paragraphs identify details, section by section, from left to right.

On the far left of the mural are three burning candles. Next to these are two calla lilies. To the right of the lilies is a burning candle next to a container of incense with billowing smoke. Above these two images is a diamond-shaped ojo de dios (eye of god). This traditional Huichol (Mexican Indian) sacred symbol is an abstract representation of the divine.

The next section shows the large profile of a female figure with braided hair tied with a bow. A circular pattern on her cheek is a symbol representing Coyoxauqui, the moon goddess of the Nahuatl (Mexican Indian) people. Her torso is made of a jaguar with a snake for a tail. The jaguar bares its fangs and strikes with its left paw at a helicopter. The snake also encircles this helicopter. The female figure is embracing a male figure carrying another figure in the water. Above and to the left is a second helicopter. Beneath the pool of water are four heads crying tears. A flash of lightning separates this section from the next one.

In the central section is a portrait of Dolores Huerta. Her eyes are looking upward and to the left as she smiles. On the left of her shirt collar is written "United Farmworkers Union"; on the right, "Dolores Huerta." The lightning from the previous section highlights one side of her head. Above her head and to the left is the logo of the United Farm Workers, a geometrically shaped eagle. To the right is a figure kneeling and praying, followed by a female figure wearing an apron and holding a broom and dustpan. Above this figure is another dustpan; below her is a heart with a dagger through it. Next to her is a male figure wearing a hat and carrying two large bags of oranges. Above him is a sewing machine; below him is a left arm. To the right is a profile of a female figure sitting down using a sewing machine. From the machine flows a long cloth. Above the seamstress is a pair of eyes.

All the images above and to the right of Huerta have holes on top for hanging and are representations of traditional and nontraditional milagros (miracles). Milagros are small charms, usually made of metal, that symbolize hope. A person asks a religious figure—usually a small statue of a saint in a church or home altar—to cure a specific ill represented by a particular milagro. If the wish is fulfilled, the milagro is placed onto or near the figure of the saint/deity that is responsible as a token of gratitude. Some of the milagros in the mural represent the kinds of employment immigrants find in the United States—maid, orange vendor, seamstress, and Popsicle vendor.

The next section also includes many details. On the left, a man stoops over a plant. To the right are five stalks of corn, representing sustenance. In the middle of these plants is a young female figure with outstretched arms showing her hands. She wears a zipped jacket, pants, and sneakers. Above her to the left and right are four milagros: a kneeling and praying woman, a heart with a dagger through it, a profile of a man pushing a Popsicle cart, and a right arm.

The next section includes two calla lilies in front of two lit candles. Next to these are a young woman's hands, palms up. The wrist on the left has an interlocking bracelet; the one on the right, a woven diamond-patterned bracelet. A calla lily and a candle are the last images on the right side of the mural. Written in cursive onto the hands is a poem by Sara Martinez, a Salvadoran political refugee, activist, and poet in Los Angeles:

Mujer

heroicas,
mujeres de piedra
que se alzan soberanas
por toda la America entera,
laboriosas, sonrientes,
generosas, forjadoras de futuro
cada día construyendo

una mañana diferente
en la calle, en la escuela,
en el campo y la ciudad.

hijas todas del maiz
constructoras de circos
sembradoras de esperanza
el la angustia.

tranformadoras del sufrimiento
en esperanzas y en sueños libertarios
que nos dan la vida....eterna

An English translation of the poem reads:

Woman

heroines,
women of stone
who raise their sovereignty
throughout all of the Americas,
hardworking, joyful,
generous, forgers of the future
building every day
a new tomorrow
in the streets, in the schools,
in the countryside, and in the city.

all daughters of the corn
builders of furrows
sowers of hope
and of anguish.

transformers of suffering
into hope and liberating dreams
who give us life . . . eternal

Technical Features

How was the artwork made? (tools, materials, and processes)

Artists use various tools and techniques in the mural-making process. Usually a preliminary study is made to establish guidelines for the process and to serve as a reference for all who work on the mural. Many murals are commissioned by cities or various organizations looking to revitalize an area. Commissions may require preliminary sketches before the approval of a mural.

Brushes of different sizes, including roller brushes, are used in making a mural. In the case of this example, the upper portion was painted in acrylic; the bottom section was done in spray paint, combining traditional techniques with new ways of painting on walls. The spray-painted section was designed and executed by Duke and Drace.

This mural was painted using a grid system, a small-scale drawing blown up to a large size. The artists used containers to rinse brushes and/or mix the paint, a sink/drain for clean-up, painting clothes/smocks, and tarps/drop cloths to keep the sidewalk free of paint. For a sixteen-foot-high mural like La Ofrenda, ladders and/or scaffolds are necessary. Insurance may also be required for the artist(s) and assistants.

If the mural is outdoors, a variety of issues need to be addressed concerning longevity and durability. The wall may need to be prepared with an undercoat prior to painting. The paint itself should be weather-resistant, exterior paint. After the entire image is painted, a sealant may be applied to the surface of the mural to protect the paint from ultraviolet light, which causes the colors to fade. Sometimes a mural is also maintained, which may involve cleaning and repainting areas that have deteriorated.

Sensory Elements

What visual elements do I see in the artwork? (line, color, shape, light and dark, texture, mass, and space)

La Ofrenda is comprised of a myriad of colors, shapes, and images. Colors are warm browns, reds, oranges, ochres, and yellows interspersed between dark blues, purples, and bright light greens. Dark and light lines outline the images. Shapes are organic, curvilinear, and fluid. The almost abstract bottom band has curvy, triangular shapes formed by the extended shadows of the running figures. Individual images have some tonal qualities (variations from light to dark), patterns, and highlights. Given the surface on which it is painted, there is some texture visible when the mural is viewed up close.

Formal Organization

How do the elements in the artwork work together? (For example, are parts repeated, balanced, emphasized, contrasted?)

The composition of La Ofrenda is arranged with a multitude of collagelike images surrounding the focal point, which is the portrait of Dolores Huerta. Balance is created by the repetition of the calla lilies and candles at both the far left and right sections of the mural. Rhythm is created by the patterns and tonal values within the individual images and the repeating use of colors, such as the blue and purple backgrounds, the dark-colored running silhouettes, and the brown skin color of the women and hands.

The bottom band of running figures and the blue ribbon at the top of the mural establish movement by following the imagery from one end to the other. Emphasis changes from section to section and is based on size and color. Harmony emerges from the variety of objects that are culturally connected and by the repetition of particular images, such as the candles, flowers, and women.

Reproduction

How is the reproduction (digitized or printed image) different from the original artwork? (size, angle of view, surface texture, etc.)

The original artwork is a large mural located under the First Street bridge (near the intersection of Second and Glendale) in a rapidly changing immigrant community near downtown Los Angeles. Although the reproduction looks smooth, the original is painted on a concrete wall and has some surface texture. Depending on the time of day, both the mural and any photographs taken of it will vary because of changing sunlight and shadows. If La Ofrenda is seen up close, the details are very large; to view the entire image, it must be looked at from a distance.

Condition

What condition (broken, restored, dirty) is the artwork in? How did it look when it was new?

La Ofrenda was painted on the wall of an underpass in 1989. The mural is in generally good condition, although it bears some skid marks that may have been made by skateboards.

Contextual Information

What can I find out about when and where the artwork was made?

Natural Context

What is the natural environment like where the artwork was made? (for example, climate, landforms, natural resources)

Downtown Los Angeles, where La Ofrenda is located, is a few miles inland from the Pacific Ocean in arid Southern California. Los Angeles is the state's largest city in both territory and population. It has a mild climate year-round, although the weather fluctuates and is sometimes unpredictable. The landforms of Los Angeles include valleys, hills, mountains, canyons, and beaches.

Functional Context

How is/was the artwork used?

The Neighborhood Pride/Great Walls Unlimited program, funded by the city of Los Angeles and administered by the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), has recently contributed greatly to the revival of murals in Los Angeles. The project has stemmed from a concern to counter destructive forces—such as drugs and gangs—found within the community. La Ofrenda is part of the Neighborhood Pride project. According to SPARC: "The Great Walls program has several goals: To foster community pride among the people living in the areas where the murals are placed; to beautify neighborhoods with inspiring works of public art; and not least to provide young people with the opportunity to learn artistic skills firsthand under professional guidance. For many of them, it is their first formal exposure to art." (SPARC, no date)

Cultural Context

What can I determine about what people thought, believed, or did in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Mexicans founded Los Angeles in 1781. They remained the primary residents of Los Angeles until the Mexican American War (1846-48), when the United States annexed California. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Mexicans became a socially ostracized, economically subordinated, and increasingly less demographically significant racial minority group.

Around 1900, large numbers of Mexican immigrants began moving into the Los Angeles area, and many settled in what came to be known as East Los Angeles. The new immigrants found themselves the victims of various forms of racial discrimination. They faced segregation in housing, education, and public accommodations and were relegated to low-paying, menial jobs. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, anti-immigrant forces joined federal and local officials who sought to find scapegoats for the city's massive unemployment problem. They deported nearly one-third of Los Angeles's population of Mexican descent, including many American-born children of immigrants.

The period around World War II saw Mexican Americans confronting overt racial attacks. European American city officials and police were alarmed by increasingly hostile Mexican American youths, who broadcast their defiance by wearing fashionable zoot suits. As a result, there were mass arrests of such youths (as many as six hundred on one weekend) after the infamous Sleepy Lagoon Trial and the Zoot Suit riots of June 1943.

The zoot suit crisis helped spark the Mexican American civil rights movement in Los

Angeles. Organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Community Service Organization helped sweep away most of the overtly segregationist policies and even achieve a modicum of political representation. Subtler forms of discrimination remained, however, especially in the areas of jobs and education.

The Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s emerged to address these problems and to instill a pride in Chicano heritage and culture that had been undermined by assimilationist educational and social policies. (The terms Mexican Americans and Chicanos are synonyms, but the latter designation usually expresses more ethnic pride and political activism.) Inspired by the United Farm Workers union and other groups, Chicano political activists gained many important victories during the era. At the same time, the movement spawned a cultural renaissance in the areas of literature, music, and the visual arts that combined aesthetics with sociopolitical concerns.

Dolores Huerta was the first vice president of the United Farm Workers. She was born in 1930 in New Mexico and received her degree from Stockton College. In 1966 she and César Chávez cofounded the National Farm Workers Association, which later became the United Farm Workers. For more than forty years she has worked as a labor leader demanding the rights of migrant farm workers. Many articles have been written about her and her life's work, and she has been the recipient of many awards. Folk ballads known as corridos have even been written about her. (See Electronic and Other Resources for more information on Dolores Huerta.) Brooklyn Street in East Los Angeles was renamed in honor of her colleague César Chávez (Chavez Ravine, mentioned in the title of the mural by Judith Baca, does not refer to the union leader, however).

Artworld Context

What can I learn about the art ideas, beliefs, and activities that were important in the culture in which the artwork was made?

The Chicano political and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s influenced today's Chicano murals by providing cultural solidarity. La Ofrenda is an example of the cultural renaissance that emerged from this movement. Many Chicano artists adopted the mural format because it harkened back to the great Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco and because it was a form of public art through which the artists' political message would have the widest audience. (See Electronic and Other Resources for artworks by and information about the Mexican Muralists.) One aspect of the Chicano cultural renaissance was the celebration of everyday life and culture, such as work, immigration, and the role of women. La Ofrenda, with its celebration of women, demonstrates the sociopolitical focus of much of Chicano art.

Los Angeles has more Chicano murals than any other city in the country; SPARC administers more than 250. La Ofrenda was commissioned by SPARC for the Neighborhood Pride project, funded by the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department.

Viewpoints for Interpretation

What can I find out about what the artwork meant to people when and where it was made and what it means to people now?

Art Maker

Why did the art maker want the artwork to look the way it does?

Yreina Cervántez clearly intended to focus on the centrality of women in the Hispanic experience. United Farm Worker union cofounder Dolores Huerta is the central figure; women dominate the two side panels as well. Moreover, the poem Mujer (Woman) is an homage to women.

Artworld Viewer

How did the person(s) for whom the artwork was made (for example, a patron, user, or other viewer of the time) understand it?

According to Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino, "La Ofrenda connected the plight of Central Americans with those of Chicanos by honoring Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farmworkers Union." (Cockcroft and Barnet-Sánchez, 1993, p. 100)

SPARC describes Cervántez's mural as follows: "La Ofrenda is a homage to the strength of Latino people. It brings attention to the hardships of war and immigration and emphasizes women's roles through the central image, a portrait of United Farmworker's Union leader, Dolores Huerta."

Cultural Understanding

How was the artwork understood within the culture in which it was made?

La Ofrenda is filled with recognizable Mesoamerican imagery. The name La Ofrenda is usually applied to altars made for the recognition of and homage to a cultural, familial, or mystic figure during the Día de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) festival. Candles, calla lilies, and incense are reminiscent of this important holiday. Other symbols, such as the eye of god, the female figure with a jaguar and snake torso, and the corn are all examples of indigenous ties to the past and present. Other issues that are likely to be relevant to Chicano viewers include the importance of the United Farm Workers union, Dolores Huerta as a labor activist, and immigration concerns, symbolized by the man carrying another figure with helicopters flying overhead. The highlight around the head of the female figure in the zipped jacket, pants, and sneakers suggests a contemporary version of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Many Chicano murals provide examples of hope, pride, and social value for the community. This mural project, along with many other Chicano murals, has been used as a tool and an opportunity for involvement. These murals focus on and define the community by using recognizable imagery often inspired by the community itself. Additionally, the neighborhood becomes involved by helping the artist with the painting.

Other Viewpoints

Are there other people's viewpoints you want to consider? If so, whose?

Dolores Huerta, the main subject of La Ofrenda, is an inspiration to many Chicanas/Latinas. Her viewpoint on the work would be most interesting. Among the many groups whose viewpoints on the mural might be enlightening are the people who walk or drive by it on a regular basis, tourists in Los Angeles, members of the United Farm Workers union, devout Catholics, non-Catholics, and feminists.

Connections among Artworks

What can I find out about connections between this artwork and other artworks?

Style

How does this artwork look like other artworks?

La Ofrenda is similar to many other Chicano murals in both painting style and imagery. (See, for example, Panamerica, by the Las Mujeres Muralistas [Patricia Rodriguez, Graciela Carillo, Consuelo Mendez, and Irene Perez].) Traits shared by many Chicano murals include a narrative composition, flatly painted images in rich and abundant colors, and the use of important cultural and political figures as subjects.

Narrative style and the integration of text are employed in traditional Mexican works known as retablos. Usually paintings on tin, they are used to commemorate an event or person. Frida Kahlo was influenced by retablos and often incorporated text into her paintings (her signature, the title of the work, and where and for whom it was painted). The text was written in cursive script in ribbonlike banners on the top and/or bottom of the artworks.

Influence

How did earlier artworks influence this artwork? How did/might it influence later artworks?

The Mexican mural movement has greatly influenced the art of the Chicano muralists. After the Mexican Revolution, the newly established revolutionary government of Mexico provided funds for the murals of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros during the 1920s. Cervántez, like the Mexican muralists, offers a national consciousness by choosing to paint subjects such as revolution, workers, and common people. La Ofrenda shares many qualities with Mexican muralism, such as a social realist approach that aims to educate the viewer. The collagelike composition of the mural shares the same spatial discontinuity seen in Rivera's and Frida Kahlo's work.

La Ofrenda also shares many similarities with earlier Chicano murals in its use of imagery, such as the eagle symbol of the United Farm Workers and the portrait of Dolores Huerta. Examples of similar work include Emigdio Vásquez's Tribute to the Chicano Working Class; Antonio Bernal's mural at the Teatro Campesino headquarters in Del Rey, California; and Luis Guerra's Texas Farmworker.

The Chicano mural movement in turn influenced the government in taking responsibility in funding and expanding public art projects. La Ofrenda is an example of city government funding administered through SPARC.

Themes

What general ideas help connect this artwork to other artworks?

The hero is a theme Cervántez shares with many other artists. Antonio Bernal painted a mural depicting Chicano and African-American heroes at the headquarters of the Teatro Campesino in 1968. Diego Rivera often expressed the theme of heroism in his murals, choosing cultural heroes such as Emiliano Zapata, V. I. Lenin, and Francisco Madera as subjects for his work. Other artists have used the hero theme by depicting other prominent figures. For example, Jacob Lawrence and Charles White depicted the heroism of Harriet Tubman; Augustus Saint-Gaudens sculpted General William Tecumseh Sherman and Robert Gould Shaw and the Fifty-fourth Regiment; Edmonia Lewis sculpted freed slaves in Forever Free; Charles Willson Peale and Gilbert Stuart painted George Washington; John Singleton Copley depicted heroism in Watson and the Shark; and Judy Chicago recognized women heroes in The Dinner Party.

The web of existence, the idea that everything influences and is connected to everything else, including historical events, is a theme in La Ofrenda. Cervántez uses historic images in her murals, connecting the present to Mesoamerican indigenous imagery such as the jaguar and snake, thus establishing ties between the present

Chicano culture and past native roots. John Biggers's The Upper Room expresses a similar theme. He uses particular, local events such as family memories, presenting them as shared universal human issues that interconnect to create the web of existence.

Frank Romero, Going to the Olympics

Mexican American Murals

Making a Place in the World

Key Artwork: Going to the Olympics

Frank Romero
b. 1941
Going to the Olympics
1984
acrylic
22 x 103 ft.
101 Freeway, Los Angeles, California

Fifteen years ago everyone in Los Angeles was excited—and a little nervous—because the 1984 Summer Olympics were coming to town. As part of the celebration, eleven murals were commissioned, including Going to the Olympics by Chicano artist Frank Romero. Romero had belonged to Los Four, a founding group of Los Angeles muralists who incorporated elements of graffiti and Chicano car culture into their work. Going to the Olympics, located near a highway interchange downtown, plays off the freeways' perennially stalled traffic as well as Los Angelenos' preoccupation with the automobile.

The information below provides extensive information about the imagery, history, and key issues of Going to the Olympics.

Information about the Art Maker or Artwork

What can I find out about the art maker or artwork?

Art Maker

Who made the artwork? What are the circumstances of the art maker's life?

Frank Romero was born in 1941 in East Los Angeles. While he was in high school, he received a scholarship to study drawing at the Otis Art Institute. He also studied at California State University, Los Angeles. In 1973 Romero became a member of Los Four, a mural design team that collaborated on public art installations and murals. He continued to work with Los Four for the next ten years. He has exhibited his work in the United States, Mexico, Europe, and Japan.

Subject Matter

What subject matter (people, places, or things) does the artwork depict, if anything?

Going to the Olympics depicts five cars of different sizes and shapes following each other in a row on a road. The cars range from an early twentieth-century automobile on the left to one from the 1950s on the right. Directly above each car is a colored heart. In between the cars are individual palm trees. Above the palm trees, floating in the sky are, from left to right, an iron, a pair of wrestlers, a Goodyear blimp, and a horse. At the upper right-hand corner of the mural is a postage stamp. The background is composed of a mountain range and a skyline of varying colors.

Technical Features

How was the artwork made? (tools, materials, and processes)

To paint a twenty-two-foot-high mural like Going to the Olympics, ladders and/or scaffolds are necessary. Romero used brooms and paint rollers to make the mural. (See Electronic and Other Resources for a photograph of Romero painting Going to the Olympics with a broom.)

Longevity and durability are issues a mural artist must address. The wall may need to be prepared with an undercoat prior to painting. The paint itself should be weather resistant. A sealant may be applied to the surface of the mural to protect the paint from ultraviolet light, which causes the colors to fade. Sometimes a mural is also maintained, which may involve cleaning and repainting areas that have deteriorated.

Sensory Elements

What visual elements do I see in the artwork? (line, color, shape, light and dark, texture, mass, and space)

Lines are used throughout the mural. They outline and form the imagery. Lines are also used in highlighting and darkening the imagery. These lines are painted over areas of color and give the mural a three-dimensional spatial quality. The lines also add the illusion of texture. Shapes are full and round. The colors used are bright reds, yellows, whites, blacks, and blues.

Formal Organization

How do the elements in the artwork work together? (For example, are parts repeated, balanced, emphasized, contrasted?)

The repeated use of lines gives the illusion of movement and vibration. Energy is created by the rhythmic patterning of the lines. The mural is balanced by the linear progression of the imagery—the components are ordered and bound by everything else in the mural. The perpendicular palm trees contrast with the overall horizontal composition of the mural.

Reproduction

How is the reproduction (digitized or printed image) different from the original artwork? (size, angle of view, surface texture, etc.)

The original artwork is a large mural painted on the retaining wall of the 101 (Hollywood) Freeway near the 110 (Pasadena) Freeway in downtown Los Angeles between San Pedro and Alameda Streets. Although the reproduction looks smooth, the original is painted on a concrete wall and has some surface texture. Because Going to the Olympics is painted on the side of a freeway, it is difficult to see while driving and is not accessible to pedestrians. In traffic delays, however, which are frequent this close to downtown, it is possible to view the mural at a very low speed. The scale of the image changes depending on the proximity and speed of the driver. If the mural is seen up close, the details are very large; in order to view the entire image, it must be looked at from a distance.

Depending on the time of day, both the mural and any photographs taken of it will vary because of changing sunlight and shadows.

Condition

What condition (broken, restored, dirty) is the artwork in? How did it look when it was new?

Many destructive elements may contribute to the demise of a mural. Because Going to the Olympics is outdoors, weather conditions—such as rain, wind, and changes in humidity—may cause the paint to peel and crack. Pollution from theexhaust of passing traffic may cause areas to darken. Graffiti can also be a problem.

Contextual Information

What can I find out about when and where the artwork was made?

Natural Context

What is the natural environment like where the artwork was made? (for example, climate, landforms, natural resources)

Downtown Los Angeles is located a few miles inland from the Pacific Ocean in arid Southern California. Los Angeles is the state's largest city in both territory and population. It has a mild climate year-round, although the weather fluctuates and is sometimes unpredictable. The landforms of Los Angeles include valleys, hills, mountains, canyons, and beaches.

Functional Context

How is/was the artwork used?

Going to the Olympics was commissioned to celebrate the 1984 Summer Olympics, held in Los Angeles. Eleven murals were made for the Olympic Arts Festival that represented different communities in Los Angeles and internationally.

Cultural Context

What can I determine about what people thought, believed, or did in the culture in which the artwork was made?

The prominence of the automobile is one of the distinctive features of Southern California life. Unlike older eastern cities, which were characterized by economically strong city cores with high population densities, Los Angeles developed at a time when technological advances such as electric streetcars allowed for population dispersal and the growth of suburbs. In fact, during the early twentieth century, Southern California developed the most extensive interurban electric railway system in the United States. The growth in population, however, quickly overwhelmed the railway system, so Southern Californians turned to automobiles for their transportation needs.

The automobile's popularity not only spurred the further development of suburbs but also created terrible traffic congestion, especially on thoroughfares approaching downtown. To address this ever worsening problem, after World War II government officials embarked on building the freeway system that today links the central city to the suburbs and the suburbs to each other. (See Electronic and Other Resources for Freeway Wars, another Romero painting about car culture.)

The 1984 Olympics were the second Olympic Games held in Los Angeles. The first were held in 1932.

Artworld Context

What can I learn about the art ideas, beliefs, and activities that were important in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Going to the Olympics is an example of the cultural renaissance that emerged from the

Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s. One aspect of this renaissance was the celebration of everyday life, such as recreational activity. Going to the Olympics, with its stylized progression of lowriders, a symbol of Mexican American youth culture, demonstrates the social focus of much of Chicano art.

Many Chicano artists adopted the mural format because it harkened back to the great Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco and because it was a form of public art through which the artists' political message would have the widest audience. (See Electronic and Other Resources for artworks by and information about the Mexican Muralists].)

Additionally, the Chicano mural movement of the 1970s, based on an effort to broaden definitions of identity through public dialogue, saw the formation of mural painting groups. Such teams included ASCO, Los Four, and East Los Streetscapers.

In 1973 Frank Romero, Carlos Almarez, Gilbert Luján, and Roberto de La Rocha founded Los Four; they were later joined by Judith Hernández and John Valdez. In 1974 Los Four had an exhibition that included a thirty-foot-long collaborative spray-painted mural at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Their murals were the first to use spray-paint techniques. Los Four collaborated on murals for the next ten years.

The Chicano movement in turn influenced Chicano murals of today—in fact, many muralists who painted in the 1970s have continued their work. Los Angeles has the largest number of Chicano murals in the United States.

Viewpoints for Interpretation

What can I find out about what the artwork meant to people when and where it was made and what it means to people now?

Art Maker

Why did the art maker want the artwork to look the way it does?

The Robert Berman Gallery, which represents the work of Frank Romero, may well be expressing Romero's general artistic intentions in the following list: "continuing themes present in Romero's other works: an acute sense of history; the influences of the Latinos on the political and cultural fabric of America; the ongoing environmental and racial problems facing our communities; an unabashed love for this city; and an optimism for the future." (See Electronic and Other Resources.)

Certainly a sense of optimism and love for Los Angeles are apparent in Going to the Olympics. References to the history of the Olympics and of car styling are also present in the mural.

Artworld Viewer

How did the person(s) for whom the artwork was made (for example, a patron, user, or other viewer of the time) understand it?

Alonzo Davis, an artist who worked for five years to find the financial support for the Freeway Olympic mural project, told a Los Angeles Times reporter that: "Our objective was to get artists who represented the energy of various communities within L.A. We wanted a diversified aesthetic statement—not all hard-edged portraits, still lifes, or the same style, but a variety." (Dunitz, 1993, p. 41) See Electronic and Other Resources for a detailed interpretation of Going to the Olympics that is focused on the history of the Olympics in Los Angeles and that of automotive style.

Cultural Understanding

How was the artwork understood within the culture in which it was made?

Peter Sellars, the director of the 1984 Olympic Arts Festival, described the commissioned murals as "murals of the fast lane." (Dunitz, 1993, p. 42)

Perhaps some people strongly focused on the Olympics will recognize that the colors of the Olympic rings are repeated in the colors of the cars in Romero's mural. Other viewers familiar with car culture might recognize a history of automotive style in the mural.

Other Viewpoints

Are there other people's viewpoints you want to consider? If so, whose?

Among the many other possible viewpoints are those of drivers who use the freeway daily. During rush hour they may see the mural as an interesting image to look upon while waiting in traffic. Car collectors may find interest in this mural because of its depiction of classic 1940s and 1950s cars. Members of car clubs may find interest in the mural since it is customary to show their cars while cruising in lines. People who lived in Los Angeles during the 1984 Olympics might have a special understanding of the mural.

Connections among Artworks

What can I find out about connections between this artwork and other artworks?

Style

How does this artwork look like other artworks?

Going to the Olympics is similar in style to street graffiti. Both the mural and graffiti use the repetition of lines and rounded forms. An example of graffiti used in art is Charles Bojórquez's Placa/Rollcall, seen in the CARA: Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation exhibition.

The building of forms through the layered repetition of small color areas or painted lines is reminiscent of Impressionism or Pointillism, as exemplified by Georges Seurat's Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte (Art Institute of Chicago).

Influence

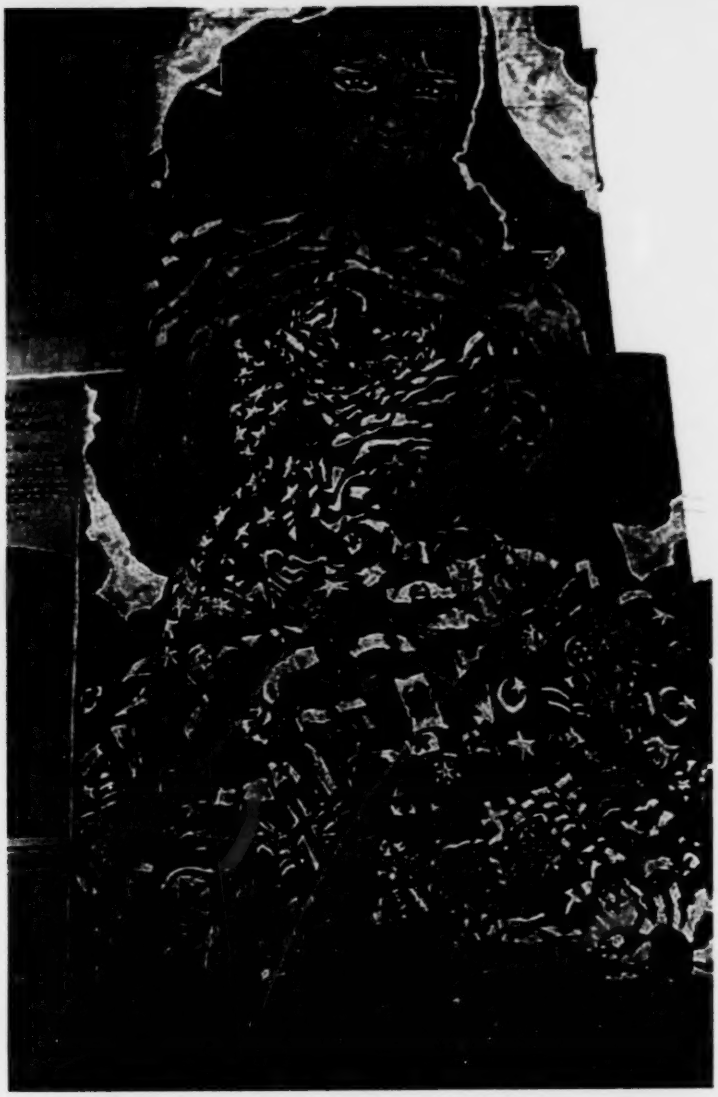
How did earlier artworks influence this artwork? How did/might it influence later artworks?

Los Four, a Chicano mural group of the 1970s, influenced Going to the Olympics in both the imagery of the cars and the graffitilike style. Los Four experimented with graffiti art techniques and the development of Chicano icons. According to CARA: Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, "Combining their formal art training with their commitment to the [Chicano] movement and the culture of their community, as individual artists they later isolated and further developed the visual forms that collectively they had used in these earlier works." (Castillo, McKenna, and Yarbro-Bejarano, 1991, p. 288)

Themes

What general ideas help connect this artwork to other artworks?

The urban barrio consciousness is a theme found in Going to the Olympics. The cars in a straight line reference cruising; the styles of the cars refer to lowriders that car club members or young people spend time detailing; the spray-painted quality of the mural is similar to graffiti. Las Tres Marias, by Judith Baca, is another example of urban barrio consciousness. In this work she illustrates two different fashion styles found among Chicanas of the 1940s and 1970s. The theme is a reflection of the value found within community aesthetics.



George Yepes, Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside)

Key Artwork: Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside)

George Yepes
b. 1955
Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside)
1989
a crylic
23 x 11 ft.
418 S. Pecan Street, Los Angeles, California

"My main and only objective is to paint the most beautiful mural of my life." So wrote artist George Yepes in his proposal to the Neighborhood Pride/ Great Walls Unlimited program. By painting a mural of a contemporary Virgin Mary swathed in national flags from around the world, he created a link to a tradition in Western art of portraying spirituality through beauty as seen in the work of Michelangelo, Botticelli, and Leonardo da Vinci. Yepes's work also includes references to the beloved Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's most holy figure. Thus, the Lady of the Eastside's embrace is all-inclusive, welcoming immigrants and residents alike.

Information about the Art Maker or Artwork

What can I find out about the art maker or artwork?

Art Maker

Who made the artwork? What are the circumstances of the art maker's life?

George Yepes was born in 1955 in East Los Angeles. He earned a degree from California State University, Los Angeles, in business administration. He also took painting classes at East Los Angeles City College and worked both as an accountant and a muralist.

Yepes is a former member of East Los Streetscapers, a group of mural painters active from 1979 to 1985. He has exhibited in twelve solo and forty-five group shows at venues that have included the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the

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Sitges-Barcelona Olympics Exhibit. He has designed more than thirty public murals as well as an album cover for Los Lobos, a Grammy Award-winning music group from East Los Angeles. Yepes established the Academia de Arte Yepes, the first free mural academy for young students in Los Angeles.

Yepes was assisted in painting Mujer del Este de Los Angeles by four teenage boys: Frederick Amador, 17; Edgar Castaneda, 16; Mark A. Galindo, 18; and Andy Ortega, 16.

Subject Matter

What subject matter (people, places, or things) does the artwork depict, if anything?

Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside) depicts a woman wearing a dark veil with a golden border. She has dark hair and is smiling. Her hands are raised to her shoulders, and she covers herself with a drapery pieced together from many flags. More than one hundred flags are shown. The Mexican flag is in the middle of her chest. Underneath it is the U.S. flag; to the right is the flag of the former Soviet Union. Behind the woman is a mandorla, a scalloped aura used in some sacred imagery.

Technical Features

How was the artwork made? (tools, materials, and processes)

Artists use various tools and techniques in the mural-making process. Usually a preliminary study is made to establish guidelines for the process and to serve as an easy reference for all who work on the mural. Yepes coordinated his own efforts with those of four teenage boys in making the mural.

To paint a twenty-three-foot-high mural like Mujer del Este de Los Angeles, ladders and/or scaffolds are necessary. Tools used in the mural-making process may include containers to rinse brushes and/or mix the paint, a sink/drain for clean-up, painting clothes/smocks, and tarps/drop cloths to keep the area below the mural free of paint. Insurance may be required for the artist and assistants, along with city permits.

Brushes of different sizes, including roller brushes, are used in making a mural. In the case of this example, a coat of thin paint was applied directly to the cinder block surface of the upper part of the wall. The lower wall was more heavily painted because of its textured stucco surface.

Sensory Elements

What visual elements do I see in the artwork? (line, color, shape, light and dark, texture, mass, and space)

Mujer del Este de Los Angeles is a bright and colorful mural. Red, green, yellow, white, and blue are the major colors used. Yepes employed black lines to outline the images. The drapery of flags is a combination of fluid, curvilinear, geometric forms. The golden mandorla in the background highlights and pushes the imagery forward, giving it a three-dimensional quality. Yepes's shading in the painting of the figure and cloth also contributes to the work's three-dimensionality.

Formal Organization

How do the elements in the artwork work together? (For example, are parts repeated, balanced, emphasized, contrasted?)

The rhythm of Mujer del Este de Los Angeles is established by the movement of the geometric flags and the folds of the drapery. Pattern is created by the use of the repeated rectangular forms of the banners and the repetition of stars, moons, and stripes. The patterning of the flags leads the viewer's gaze up toward the woman's hands and to the mural's focal point, the woman's smiling face. The composition of Lady of the Eastside contrasts the heavily patterned drapery with the minimal use of patterning in the figure.

Reproduction

How is the reproduction (digitized or printed image) different from the original artwork? (size, angle of view, surface texture, etc.)

The original artwork is a large mural painted on the side of a building at the intersection of the 101 Freeway and Fourth Street in Los Angeles. There is a nine-inch angled ledge a little over halfway up the mural. (See Electronic and Other Resources for a view of the site.) Although the reproduction looks smooth, the original is painted on block walls and has surface texture. The lower wall is more textured than the upper wall. The scale of the image changes depending on the proximity of the viewer. If the mural is seen up close, the details are very large; in order to view the entire image, it must be looked at from a distance. There is lighting at the site to illuminate the mural at night.

Condition

What condition (broken, restored, dirty) is the artwork in? How did it look when it was new?

Yepes noted in his proposal to the Neighborhood Pride/Great Walls Unlimited program that the mural site was securely fenced in and that the building had recently been reinforced to meet earthquake standards. Murals are vulnerable to many destructive forces: weather conditions, including changes in humidity, may cause the paint to peel and crack; colors may fade because of the strong California sun; and graffiti can be a problem.

Contextual Information

What can I find out about when and where the artwork was made?

Natural Context

What is the natural environment like where the artwork was made? (for example, climate, landforms, natural resources)

Mujer del Este de Los Angeles is located in East Los Angeles, which is east of the Los Angeles River and downtown. Because it is a few miles inland from the Pacific Ocean in arid Southern California, East Los Angles tends to be hotter than the coastal areas. Los Angeles is California's largest city in both territory and population. It has a mild climate year-round, although the weather fluctuates and is sometimes unpredictable.

Functional Context

How is/was the artwork used?

Many of the murals painted in Los Angeles in the last twenty-five years came out of the Neighborhood Pride/Great Walls Unlimited program, which was initiated by the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) and funded by the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department. According to SPARC, "The Great Walls program has several goals: To foster community pride among the people living in the areas where the murals are placed; to beautify neighborhoods with inspiring works of public art; and not least to provide young people with the opportunity to learn artistic skills firsthand under professional guidance. For many of them, it is their first formal exposure to art." (SPARC, no date)

Cultural Context

What can I determine about what people thought, believed, or did in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Mexicans founded Los Angeles in 1781, naming it El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles (the Village of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels). They remained the primary residents of Los Angeles until the Mexican American War (1846-48), when the United States annexed California. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Mexicans became a socially ostracized, economically subordinated, and increasingly less demographically significant minority group.

Around 1900, large numbers of Mexican immigrants began moving into the Los Angeles area, and many settled in what came to be known as East Los Angeles. The new immigrants found themselves the victims of various forms of racial discrimination. They faced segregation in housing, education, and public accommodations and were relegated to low-paying, menial jobs. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, anti-immigrant forces joined federal and local officials who sought to find scapegoats for the city's massive unemployment problem. They deported nearly one-third of Los Angeles's population of Mexican descent, including many American-born children of immigrants.

The period around World War II saw Mexican Americans confronting overt racial attacks. European American city officials and police were alarmed by increasingly hostile Mexican American youths, who broadcast their defiance by wearing fashionable zoot suits. As a result, there were mass arrests of such youths (as many as six hundred in one weekend) after the infamous Sleepy Lagoon Trial and the Zoot Suit riots of June 1943.

The zoot suit crisis helped spark the Mexican American civil rights movement in Los Angeles. Organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Community Service Organization helped sweep away most of the overtly segregationist policies and even achieve a modicum of political representation. Subtler forms of discrimination remained, however, especially in the areas of jobs and education. The Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s emerged to address these problems and to instill a sense of pride in Chicano heritage and culture that had been undermined by assimilationist educational and social policies. (The terms Mexican Americans and Chicanos are synonyms, but the latter designation usually expresses more ethnic pride and political activism.)

In recent years the ethnic character of Los Angeles has again changed. Large-scale immigration from Central America and Asia has combined with continued immigration from Mexico to make Los Angeles into what some commentators have called the new Ellis Island.

Artworld Context

What can I learn about the art ideas, beliefs, and activities that were important in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Mujer del Este de Los Angeles is an example of the cultural renaissance that emerged from the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s. One aspect of this renaissance was the celebration of everyday life and culture, such as work, immigration, and the role of women. Yepes's mural, with its celebration of cultural diversity, demonstrates the sociopolitical focus of much of Chicano art.

Many Chicano artists adopted the mural format because it harkened back to the great Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco and because it was a form of public art through which the artists' political message would have the widest audience. (See Electronic and Other Resources for artworks by and information about the Mexican Muralists.) Additionally, the Chicano mural movement of the 1970s, based on an effort to broaden definitions of identity through public dialogue, saw the formation of mural painting groups. Such teams included ASCO, Los Four, and Los Dos (The Two) Streetscapers. (Los Dos Streetscapers originally included Wayne Healy and David Botello, but they expanded the group to include George Yepes and changed their name to East Los Streetscapers.) The Chicano movement in turn influenced Chicano murals of today. In fact, many muralists that painted in the 1970s have continued their work. Many murals are commissioned by cities or various organizations looking to revitalize an area. SPARC has administered over 250 murals. Los Angeles has the largest number of Chicano murals in the United States.

Viewpoints for Interpretation

What can I find out about what the artwork meant to people when and where it was made and what it means to people now?

Art Maker

Why did the art maker want the artwork to look the way it does?

In August 1989 George Yepes wrote a proposal for Mujer del Este de Los Angeles to the Neighborhood Pride/Great Walls Unlimited program:

> The mural I propose will embrace a simple yet dramatic design that will have the greatest impact on the viewing public. One figure will dominate the design of the mural. Behind the mural wall looms the city named after "Our Lady of the Angels:" therefore, it is only appropriate that the mural should be a woman, "The Lady of the Eastside." Dressed in a multi-colored robe of culture, she will represent a community that has poured out of the boundaries of the city. "The Lady" will radiate cultural pride and dignity. Majestic in stature, angelic in pose and posture, she will stand as a

> welcome beacon on the edge of our city. The color rendering will incorporate the colors of our cultures' flags into the tapestry woven across the mural. My main and only objective is to paint the most beautiful mural of my life, to date.

Artworld Viewer

How did the person(s) for whom the artwork was made (for example, a patron, user, or other viewer of the time) understand it?

Shauna Snow of the Los Angeles Times wrote:

> Rather than be grouped with other contemporary Latino artists, George Yepes strives to follow in the tradition of Mexican Masters like Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera. The artist lets the strength of his painting speak for themselves and leaves further interpretation of his works up to the individual viewers. In Mujer del Este de Los Angeles, Yepes's flag-draped madonna stands tall as a representation of the multi-cultural melting pot of culture in Los Angeles. The piece seems to say that, like the East L.A. bred Yepes, people of divers nationalities can rise to prominence in our city of angels.

Vincent Price, an actor who was also a well-known patron of the arts, said this of George Yepes:

> Los Angeles is a city suddenly in full bloom as a world art center. In the center of this are the whirling forces of our brilliant ethnic artists. George Yepes shines among them with the vitality worthy of a star force in the arts of our time. (Vincent Price Art Gallery Web site)

Tom Silliman, director of the Vincent Price Gallery, wrote:

> The powerful, passionate, exciting images of George Yepes are totally captivating, and his exuberant talent destines him to become one of the major painters of Los Angeles. (Vincent Price Art Gallery Web site)

Cultural Understanding

How was the artwork understood within the culture in which it was made?

Many Chicano murals provide examples of hope, pride, and social value for the community. This mural project, along with many other Chicano murals, has been used as a tool and an opportunity for involvement. These murals focus on and define the community by using recognizable imagery often inspired by the community itself. Finally, the neighborhood becomes involved by helping the artist with the painting.

Mexican Americans familiar with the beloved holy figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe may see similarities between her image and that of the Mujer del Este de Los Angeles, particularly in the treatment of the mandorlas and cloaks. The cascading flags can even be compared with the flowers that fell from Juan Diego's mantle in the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe's appearance to him in sixteenth-century Mexico.

Other Viewpoints

Are there other people's viewpoints you want to consider? If so, whose?

Among the many people who might have enlightening viewpoints on Mujer del Este de Los Angeles are those who see the mural every day, including the residents of the Aliso Pico Housing Project, which is across the street from the mural; commuters traveling north on the 101 Freeway; and employees of the A&R Tarpaulin Company, on whose property the mural is located.

Other groups who might have opinions are feminists, teachers, tourists, and immigrants. Feminists may see the image as symbolizing the feminine. Teachers may use the mural as a tool to teach the tradition of the acceptance of immigrants into the United States. Tourists and immigrants may feel that the mural welcomes them to the city.

Connections among Artworks

What can I find out about connections between this artwork and other artworks?

Style

How does this artwork look like other artworks?

Mujer del Este de Los Angeles is a part of a tradition of figurative painting that stretches from the masters of the Italian Renaissance to Thomas Eakins, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Andrew Wyeth, and many others. All share a thorough understanding of human anatomy and an ability to draw the human figure realistically.

Influence

How did earlier artworks influence this artwork? How did/might it influence later artworks?

The Mexican mural movement has greatly influenced the art of the Chicano muralists. David Alfaro Siqueiros, one of the three great Mexican muralists, was the first to write concerning teams collaborating on murals. However, the Chicano mural movement in the 1970s was the first to acknowledge the importance of community participation. According to Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals, "The notion of an artistic team collaborating on a public mural can be found in the writings of Siqueiros, however the inclusion of (often untrained) community participants as painters appears to be unique to the U.S. street mural movement of the 1970s." (Cockcroft and Barnet-Sánchez, 1993, p. 3)

The Chicano mural movement in Los Angeles was generated by the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Many Chicano murals were painted in the barrios and ghettos; these depicted a wide variety of ideas, such as spiritual traditions, cultural heroes, ancestral symbols, and political and social concerns. Examples include David Botello's Read Between the Lines, painted in 1975 at Ford and Olympic Boulevards, or Juan Ordoñez's Where Heroes Are Born, painted in 1983 at 3881 North Broadway, both in East Los Angeles.

Themes

What general ideas help connect this artwork to other artworks?

The depiction of beautiful women is a recurring theme that connects Mujer del Este de Los Angeles with artworks such as Sandro Botticelli's Birth of Venus. The expression of spiritual beliefs through feminine beauty is a familiar idea in Western art-an example is Michelangelo's Pieta. The portrayal of the Virgin Mary is found throughout Western art history. Examples include Leonardo da Vinci's Virgin of the Rocks, Raphael's Madonna del Cardellino, and Jan van Eyck's The Virgin with the Canon van der Paele.

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Unknown Maya Art Maker(s), Presentation of the Heir
http://www.halfmoon.org/bonampak.html

Mexican American Murals

Making a Place in the World

Key Artwork: Presentation of the Heir

Unknown Maya Art Maker(s)
(copy by Antonio Tejeda based on the original)
Presentation of the Heir
Probably A.D. 790-92 (copy is from 1947)
Fresco (copy is watercolor)
Approximately 10 x 15 ft. (copy is 1/4 scale)
Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico (copy is at the Museo Nacional de Antropologia in Mexico City)

This image appears on the México Desconocido Web site at http://www.mexicodesconocido.com.mx/hipertex/area3.htm

A dynasty's hopes for and claims on the future is the subject of artworks found throughout the world. In Presentation of the Heir, a mural painted around twelve hundred years ago in Bonampak, a Maya ceremonial center in Mexico, a small boy is presented to a group of nobles as their future ruler. Maya hieroglyphs running along the bottom of the mural detail the events and the people involved. Despite the royal family's hopes, scholars think the little boy probably never reached the throne; look closely and you'll see that his eyes have been gouged out, symbolically robbing him and his family of power.

The Maya, who created one of the most magnificent cultures of the Western Hemisphere, have lived throughout Mexico and Guatemala from 1200 B.C. to the present. The great flourishing of Maya culture is known as the Classic Maya era, which lasted from around A.D. 250 to A.D. 850. The Maya built great cities and ceremonial centers; Bonampak was a satellite of the powerful city of Yaxchilán, located in what is now the Mexican state of Chiapas. Bonampak's beautiful murals, painted around A.D. 790, were brought to the attention of an American filmmaker by two Lacandón Maya men in the 1940s and have been studied extensively by archaeologists and art historians ever since. Because archaeologists have learned to read the mysterious Maya glyphs, we have learned the story of dynastic succession told by the artwork.

The information below provides extensive information about the imagery, history, and key issues of Presentation of the Heir.

Information about the Art Maker or Artwork

What can I find out about the art maker or artwork?

Art Maker

Who made the artwork? What are the circumstances of the art maker's life?

There is no record of the Maya who built Bonampak and painted its murals except for the buildings and artworks themselves. Inconsistencies in the paintings suggest that more than one artist may have been involved with the work, each with a different task. Presumably these art makers worked under the direction of the royal family and astronomer-priests.

Subject Matter

What subject matter (people, places, or things) does the artwork depict, if anything?

Presentation of the Heir is thought by archaeologists to show the presentation of a young boy to ten nobles as the future successor to the throne. The mural is located on a wall in one of three rooms in a building at Bonampak. All three rooms have murals that depict ritual events that happened between A.D. 790 and A.D. 792. In addition to the images, writing also adorns the murals, but for many years the Maya writing system—known as glyphs—could not be translated. When archaeologists finally made breakthroughs in reading the glyphs, Mary Miller, a prominent Bonampak scholar, concluded that the murals show the following events: "Room 1 depicts a young heir being presented to prestigious lords, who then hold a lavish celebration. In Room 2 a chaotic battle provides captives for human sacrifice to appease the gods and honor the new heir. In Room 3 Bonampak's elite seal the heir's right to the throne with a dramatic bloodletting ritual." (Miller, 1995, p. 56) See Electronic and Other Resources for copies of other Bonampak murals.

The clothing and other adornments worn by the nobles show their social status; white shapes above their heads were probably intended to hold their names, which were never painted in. The nobles' elaborate and colorful headdresses suggest birds, the heads of jaguars, and bats, all of which had mythological or symbolic importance.

Nine of the ten nobles in Presentation of the Heir stand in frontal positions, but all their heads are in profile, showing their sloping foreheads, the result of skull binding in childhood. (The Maya, like some other American peoples, flattened babies' skulls by binding them to boards. In some groups, flattened heads indicated status.) The man on the dais at right and the child seated in his arms are also in profile. The child stares straight ahead, but the man holding him faces backward toward the end wall of Room 1, where the royal family is depicted on the throne. The boy's eyes have been gouged out, possibly in Maya times as a symbolic way of robbing him of power.

Writing appears in a band below the nobles; large animal-like shapes appear above the white shapes over the noblemen's heads.

Technical Features

How was the artwork made? (tools, materials, and processes)

The ancient Maya used plant and mineral pigments to paint Presentation of the Heir. It's not certain, though, how the artists painted the murals. It's possible that they used a true fresco technique by painting on wet plaster, or maybe they mixed the colors with water and painted on dry plaster. Some of the pigments—such as the mineral azurite, used to make blue—were quite costly.

Art historians have analyzed how the murals were painted. First, the artist(s) drew the figures lightly in red on the plaster. This red line was covered when color was applied, such as the brick red for the bodies and the jade coloring of the ear and throat pendants. Finally, the figures were outlined in black, possibly by a different artist, who did not always follow the precise colored outlines of the figures.

Sensory Elements

What visual elements do I see in the artwork? (line, color, shape, light and dark, texture, mass, and space)

The murals are very detailed. The artists filled in spaces with flat, mostly warm colors and defined shapes with masterly outlines. The colored areas (such as the nobles and the complex figures in the band above their heads) have crisp, even edges.

Formal Organization

How do the elements in the artwork work together? (For example, are parts repeated, balanced, emphasized, contrasted?)

Presentation of the Heir is organized into very distinct horizontal bands. Although the figures themselves are not active, the artists created rhythmic movement by repeating shapes, such as the figures, robes, headdresses, and spaces for the noble's names. The fluidity of lines in the Maya glyphs below the figures continues in the contours of the nobles as well as in the serpentine shapes in the top band of the mural. Below Presentation of the Heir is a painting of a procession of musicians that wraps around the entire room.

Reproduction

How is the reproduction (digitized or printed image) different from the original artwork? (size, angle of view, surface texture, etc.)

The digitized image was made from a one-fourth-scale copy of the Bonampak wall mural. Located at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, the copy was painted by Antonio Tejeda in watercolor in 1947 from careful measurements and color notes taken at Bonampak.

No reproduction can convey the effect of seeing Presentation of the Heir in the room within which it was originally painted. The mural is located in the first of three rooms within a structure that is one of several in a complex now called the Bonampak Acropolis. The doorways into the structure with the murals are slightly more than three feet wide and less than six feet tall, which would force an adult wearing an elaborate headdress to stoop. As observed in The Art of Mesoamerica from Olmec to Aztec, "No Mayan in full regalia stepped through the door without lowering himself to a position of obeisance." (Miller, 1986a, p. 21-22)

The walls in the rooms slope together, almost touching at the top, and are completely covered with paintings. Presentation of the Heir is painted on one of the sloping walls. It is 10 feet high and 15 feet long; the figures are two-thirds life size. Stone benches cover most of the floor space in the room, leaving only a small space in which to stand. According to The Murals at Bonampak:

> When entering Room 1 at Bonampak, the viewer is enveloped by the painted procession that wraps around all the walls on the lower register. It a noisy event, and within such a confined space as Room 1, sound almost seems to reverberate. Yet for all its activity, the scene's direction is very clearly stated: the procession enters through the door in pairs of marchers, then splits off into two single files. The viewer may not realize he has entered as part of a procession, but the architecture directs the viewer's relation to the painting. (Miller, 1986b, p. 58)

Condition

What condition (broken, restored, dirty) is the artwork in? How did it look when it was new?

In 1946, Lacandón Maya Indians led Giles Healey, a filmmaker working for the United Fruit Company, to Bonampak. The site was overgrown with rain forest trees and other plants. Then as now the murals inside the structures were obscured by mineral deposits: water leaking through the limestone walls had deposited calcite over the murals. Although this deposit obscured the murals, it also protected them from decay.

Since the murals' discovery, however, deterioration has been extensive. By the early 1960s, the surrounding jungle had been cut down and a roof built over the structure, which changed the conditions inside the Bonampak temple complex. When it was surrounded by jungle, the interior had been cool and damp; without the protective forest canopy, it became hot and dry. The tin roof collected and focused heat, causing the murals to dry out and flake off the walls. Removal of the mineral deposits encouraged green fungi to grow over the murals.

Today, tourists visit Bonampak regularly despite poor roads. They sometimes trace outlines of the figures with sweaty fingers, causing further damage to the artwork. If a good road is built to the site, the paintings are not likely to survive for long. Extensive study and restoration of the murals has been conducted by a number of organizations, but more will need to be done to save these artworks for future generations.

Contextual Information

What can I find out about when and where the artwork was made?

Natural Context

What is the natural environment like where the artwork was made? (for example, climate, landforms, natural resources)

Bonampak is located in the Mexican state of Chiapas, west of the Usumacinta River. More specifically it is located on the north side of the Lacanhá River Valley. The complex of buildings is deep within a large, dense, and very humid tropical rain forest.

Functional Context

How is/was the artwork used?

The function of the Bonampak murals, of which Presentation of the Heir is one of many, was to confirm the child shown in the painting as a legitimate heir. Scholars think that the glyphs (words) painted below the figures were more important to the Maya than the images of the people and that the murals were illustrated texts rather than pictures with captions. As scholars deciphered the writing, they learned that the glyphs described the ceremonies that honored Bonampak's heir. They also told how his right to rule Bonampak was governed by the lord of Yaxchilán, a powerful city to the north that controlled Bonampak. The Maya did not live at Bonampak; it was used mostly as a ceremonial center and stage for public rituals.

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Cultural Context

What can I determine about what people thought, believed, or did in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Classic Maya civilization lasted from approximately A.D. 250 to A.D. 850 in what is now Mexico and Guatemala. Besides Yaxchilán, other great Maya city-states included Tikal, Palenque, Uxmal, and Copán. (We do not know what the Maya called the site of the murals, but it was named Bonampak, "painted walls" in the Maya language, by archaeologist Sylvanus Morley.) Scholars believe that the Classic Maya civilization was in its declining years when the Bonampak murals were painted between A.D. 790 and A.D. 792: "Perhaps the Maya suffered famine or warfare. We know only that these murals were never finished and that the young heir they celebrate likely never reached the throne." (Miller, 1995, p. 58)

Before the discovery of the murals at Bonampak in the 1940s, scholars thought that the Maya were a peaceful people. However, scenes of bloodletting in the murals and the subsequent translation of glyphs show that the Maya were sometimes very combative and engaged in aggressive and ritual warfare.

Presentation of the Heir shows the importance of complex clothing and headdresses to the nobles of Bonampak. Textiles were important in Maya culture, although few actual textiles have survived the humid jungle environment. According to M. E. Miller, "Training in the manipulation of cloth may have been an aspect of courtly education." (Miller, 1986, p. 160)

Artworld Context

What can I learn about the art ideas, beliefs, and activities that were important in the culture in which the artwork was made?

The murals of Bonampak were painted late in the Classic Maya era and were probably based on a long tradition of mural painting.

Viewpoints for Interpretation

What can I find out about what the artwork meant to people when and where it was made and what it means to people now?

Art Maker

Why did the art maker want the artwork to look the way it does?

Besides the buildings and murals at Bonampak, no record remains to testify to the intentions of the art maker(s).

Artworld Viewer

How did the person(s) for whom the artwork was made (for example, a patron, user, or other viewer of the time) understand it?

Special groups may have funded the work on the paintings. Perhaps "the groups depicted in the Bonampak murals paid for the rituals and celebrations, and maybe even to have their portraits painted." (Miller, 1997, p. 40) Today we can only imagine the impact of the murals on the royal family and nobles depicted in the artworks and on the other Maya privileged enough to have been allowed to see them.

Cultural Understanding

How was the artwork understood within the culture in which it was made?

The paintings at Bonampak justified and reinforced the power of the established ruling family:

> The Bonampak lords were masters of manipulation. I would be surprised if the great celebrations at Bonampak occurred without agricultural meaning. The figure who holds an ear of corn in Room 1...shows an ear still in its green husk, and he had pulled back the husk to reveal yellow kernels. [The ear of corn is not seen in Presentation of the Heir.] As the child is presented on the upper register, so corn is displayed on the lower. These two parallel events, the display of new seed, cannot help but reinforce each other. (Miller, 1986b, pp. 150-51)

Other Viewpoints

Are there other people's viewpoints you want to consider? If so, whose?

In 1946 two Lacandón Maya Indians took a filmmaker with the United Fruit Company to Bonampak. Imagine how Acasio Chan and José Pepe Chambor, the two Maya, understood the Bonampak murals before they led an outsider to the site. Imagine the filmmaker's perspective on the murals as the first nonnative person to view them.

Interpretations of the Bonampak murals have changed as more information about Maya culture has come to light and as glyphs have been translated. When the Bonampak murals were discovered, scholars rooted in nineteenth-century theories about the Maya assumed that they lived in a peaceful society ruled by astronomer-priests and made no records of everyday reality. In 1960, after breakthroughs were made in the translation of the Maya language, it became clear that the glyphs accompanying the paintings were, in fact, historical names and dates. As a result, a record of dynasties, regional powers, and ritual warfare has been established.

Among the many other groups whose viewpoints on the Bonampak murals might be enlightening are members of ruling families, contemporary Lacandón Maya people, tourists, and contemporary Mexican and Chicano muralists.

Connections among Artworks

What can I find out about connections between this artwork and other artworks?

Style

How does this artwork look like other artworks?

Classic Maya art is known from architecture, murals, carvings, ceramics, and jewelry found at sites throughout Mexico and Guatemala. Although the six centuries of the Classic Maya period represent only a part of Maya culture, much Maya art used similar approaches and treated related subject matter. Most Maya art is elaborate and compact, and forms in Maya wall and ceramic painting are expressive and rhythmic. Often the artwork depicts ceremonies that are forgotten and thus are difficult for us to understand today. Sometimes, however, the subjects are recognizably, even poignantly, human—as in the depiction of the small boy in Presentation of the Heir.

Although there are other Classic Maya murals, those at Bonampak are more elaborate than most and are thought by many to be the finest Maya artwork yet discovered. Their naturalistic details and delicate lines distinguish these murals from other Maya paintings.

Influence

How did earlier artworks influence this artwork? How did/might it influence later artworks?

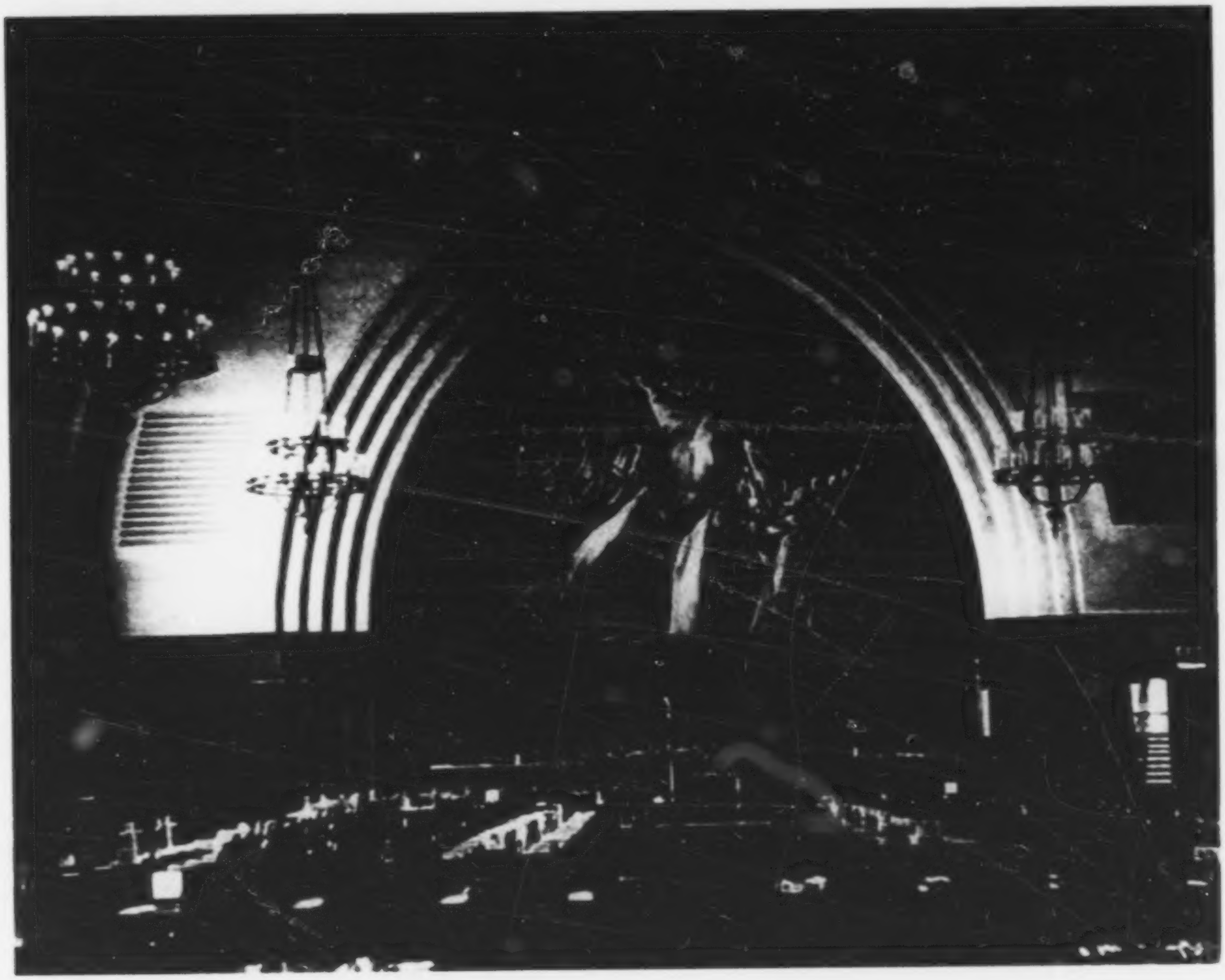
Stages of development and influence have not been clearly documented in Maya murals. However, because the Bonampak murals are so sophisticated, it seems likely that they must represent the culmination of many years of technical development by Maya artists.

Mural painting was associated not only with monuments of ancient Mesoamerican culture but also with the churches and monasteries of Mexico after the Spanish conquest. These murals were often created by Indian painters—some of them possibly descendants of the Aztec and the Maya.

Themes

What general ideas help connect this artwork to other artworks?

Dynastic rule is a theme this Maya mural shares with many artworks made in cultures throughout the world. Stone altars of the older Olmec civilization of Mesoamerica have been found decorated with depictions of royal children. Diego Velásquez, Anthony Van Dyck, and many other court painters depicted the royal families of Europe. After the French Revolution, Napoleon had his court painter, Jacques-Louis David, make a painting recording his coronation as emperor. With the advent of photography, capturing family relationships became possible even for those who could not afford to have portraits painted. Family photographs of adults and children continue to flourish today.



José Clemente Orozco, Prometheus

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Mexican American Murals
Making a Place in the World

Key Artwork: Prometheus

José Clemente Orozco
(1883-1949)
Prometheus
1930
Fresco
20 x 28 1/2 ft.
Pomona College, Claremont, California

Since 1930, students at Pomona College in Southern California have dined in the presence of the monumental Prometheus, a work by José Clemente Orozco, one of the masters of the modern mural. Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros were Los Tres Grandes, the Three Great Ones, of Mexico's mid-twentieth-century artworld. (See Electronic and Other Resources for artworks by and information about Los Tres Grandes.) Like his colleagues, Orozco believed that art had social and political importance and, as he wrote in 1929, that "the highest, the most logical, the purest form of painting is the mural. It is, too, the most disinterested form, for it cannot be made a matter of private gain: it cannot be hidden away for the benefit of a certain privileged few. It is for the people. It is for ALL." (Rochfort, 1993, p. 40)

Information about the Art Maker or Artwork

What can I find out about the art maker or artwork?

Art Maker

Who made the artwork? What are the circumstances of the art maker's life?

José Clemente Orozco was born in 1883 in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. While a teenager, he suffered an accident with gunpowder that left him with a hearing loss, eye damage, and the loss of his left hand at the wrist. Despite his injuries, Orozco studied agriculture and architecture and, at age twenty-three, decided to become an artist. He enrolled at the San Carlos Academy in Mexico City, studying there from 1906 to 1910. In 1912 he opened a studio in a poor neighborhood of Mexico City. After participating in the Mexican Revolution, he held his first one-person show in Mexico City in 1916, exhibiting somber paintings of prostitutes, schoolgirls, and some political caricatures. The show was not well received.

In 1917 Orozco traveled to the United States, crossing the border at Laredo, Texas. U.S. Customs agents there judged seventy of his paintings to be immoral and destroyed them. To make a living, Orozco painted signs in San Francisco and dolls' faces in New York City. In 1920 he returned to Mexico, where he found work as a newspaper cartoonist.

Orozco supported his mother, wife, and three children modestly in Mexico City. In 1927, at the age of forty-four, he sold a painting to buy a train ticket to the United States. He had eight one-person shows in the U.S. and received three important mural commissions, one at Pomona College in California (Prometheus), one at the New School for Social Research in New York, and one at Dartmouth College in Massachusetts. By the early 1930s Orozco was gaining enough acceptance as an artist in New York that he was able to bring his wife and children to live with him.

In 1934 Orozco returned to Mexico City. Along with Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, he received important government-funded commissions for murals. He and Rivera both painted murals in the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City; Orozco also painted murals at the National Preparatory School and the Supreme Court. His public murals in the city of Guadalajara are at the Governor's Palace, the University of Guadalajara, the capitol building for the state of Jalisco, and the Guadalajara Orphanage.

Orozco, the oldest of Los Tres Grandes, the three great Mexican muralists, died of a heart attack in Mexico City in 1949. (See Electronic and Other Resources for artworks by and information about Los Tres Grandes.)

Subject Matter

What subject matter (people, places, or things) does the artwork depict, if anything?

Prometheus shows a very large, muscular, man straining upward as if to support the arch over his head. His right leg is outstretched, his arms are angled, and his head is tipped severely. He is surrounded by many dramatically posed, nude figures, many with upraised arms. A seated couple embraces in the lower left corner. There are also angular, perhaps architectural, forms depicted on the right, left, and top portions of the mural.

Up close one can see dark vertical elements on the right and left side, a dark angular shape over Prometheus's hands, and above that a broken band of intense blue. There are also blue elements in the lower corners: an arrowlike shape at right and a blue gown worn by the woman embraced by the man at left.

Technical Features

How was the artwork made? (tools, materials, and processes)

Orozco, working with his assistant Crespo de la Serna, made three general studies for Prometheus. The two sketched and planned for a couple of weeks before beginning the mural. Orozco used de la Serna and student volunteers as models for his sketches. Sometimes he used coordinates to transfer his sketches to the wall; at other times he drew directly on the wall using his sketches as guides. He employed short, almost slashing brushstrokes. As he worked on the wall, he made his figures more monumental and reworked Prometheus's arms to repeat the shape of the top of the arch. An artist who observed Orozco said "he worked in a spontaneous improvisational manner directly on the wall." (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 39)

In painting Prometheus, Orozco employed methods used for centuries by traditional fresco painters. After applying a plaster coating to a wall, a fresco painter transfers his or her drawing (called a cartoon) to the surface of the wall. Each day a section of new plaster is applied to the wall. On this wet section of plaster the artist paints with pigments mixed with plain or lime water (calcium hydroxide). A chemical reaction takes place as the plaster cures, and the colors become a permanent part of the wall. Changes can only be made by chipping away sections of the dry plaster and beginning again.

Sensory Elements

What visual elements do I see in the artwork? (line, color, shape, light and dark, texture, mass, and space)

The colors in Prometheus are mostly warm reds, oranges, and browns, with a few areas of intense blue. Orozco used the full range of values, from black to white. His use of contrasting lights and darks in his representation of figures gives them a solid, three-dimensional quality.

Even though the subject matter of Orozco's Prometheus consists almost entirely of human figures, he has exaggerated their geometric, angular qualities and emphasized these qualities with his strong brush strokes.

Formal Organization

How do the elements in the artwork work together? (For example, are parts repeated, balanced, emphasized, contrasted?)

Prometheus has a generally symmetrical composition. Within the arched format of the mural, the central figure is framed on both sides with small figures and angular shapes.

Diagonal movement runs throughout the composition. The strongest diagonal runs from Prometheus's right leg through his left arm. The dramatically extended arms, legs, and torsos of the other figures crisscross in diagonals across much of the rest of the painting. Diagonals are emphasized by the dark triangular shapes pointing up and inward into the red-orange upper part of the mural.

The rows of nearly white heads across the center of the mural form a downward diagonal that balances the upward diagonal of the arch above the central figure. The resulting horizontal diamond shape is echoed in the smaller diamond shape formed by Prometheus's arms.

The generally warm colors of the painting are dramatically emphasized by the contrasting intense blue shapes, which anchor the three corners of the arched triangular composition.

Reproduction

How is the reproduction (digitized or printed image) different from the original artwork? (size, angle of view, surface texture, etc.)

Prometheus is painted on a wall of the men's dining hall at Pomona College in California. Pomona is east of Los Angeles, about forty miles from downtown. Unlike looking at the reproduction on-line, architectural elements in the dining hall can block a complete view of the mural.

Condition

What condition (broken, restored, dirty) is the artwork in? How did it look when it was new?

Because a true fresco is painted directly into the wet plaster of a wall, it is durable but very difficult to repair. In 1982 the wall behind Prometheus was beginning to crumble and was reinforced from behind to save the mural. Prometheus has been cleaned and areas where paint is missing have been replaced.

Contextual Information

What can I find out about when and where the artwork was made?

Functional Context

How is/was the artwork used?

Prometheus illustrates a classic story from Greek mythology. Prometheus was a giant who stole fire from the gods to give to humankind. His father, Zeus, punished him by chaining him to a rock and having an eagle eat his liver, which grew back daily only to be eaten again. The gift of fire allowed humans to be superior to all other animals on the earth and led to the introduction of both art and commerce.

Orozco may have intended his painting of Prometheus, the bringer of fire, to serve as a complement to the name and rituals of Pomona College. The institution was named after the Roman goddess of fruit; "each spring the school enacted the traditional 'Flame Ceremony'—the carrying of lighted candles by teachers and alumni symbolizing the passing on of knowledge, goodness, and mercy to succeeding classes of students." (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 29)

Cultural Context

What can I determine about what people thought, believed, or did in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Orozco witnessed and participated in many turbulent events in his lifetime, which had an impact on his artwork. He took part in the Mexican Revolution, for example, which left two million people dead but eventually replaced a dictatorship with a constitutional democracy. Orozco wrote about his experience of the Mexican Revolution:

> Trains back from the battlefield unloaded their cargoes in the station of Orizaba; the wounded, the tired, exhausted, mutilated soldiers, sweating.... In the world of politics it was the same, war without quarter, struggle for power and wealth, factions and sub-factions past counting, the thirst for vengeance insatiable....Farce, drama, barbarity...a parade of stretchers with the wounded in bloody rags, and all at once the savage pealing of bells and a thunder of rifle fire...'La Cucaracha' accompanied by firing. (Ashton, 1990, p. 591)

The stock market crash of 1929, which occurred just prior to the painting of Prometheus, and the Great Depression also affected Orozco:

> Factories closed and immense negotiations at a standstill. Panic. Suspended credit....By night in the protection of shadows, whole crowds begged in the street for a nickel for coffee and there was no doubt, not the slightest, that they needed it. This was the Crash. Disaster. (Ashton, 1990, p. 598)

Artworld Context

What can I learn about the art ideas, beliefs, and activities that were important in the culture in which the artwork was made?

As a young man, Orozco visited the workshop of José Guadalupe Posada, a prolific popular printmaker of the turn of the twentieth century in Mexico whose work was satiric and political. (See Electronic and Other Resources for more on Posada.) Orozco believed that Posada's prints had deep cross-cultural values. He "deplored [the then generally accepted] folkloric interpretation" of Posada's work. (Ashton, 1990, p. 541)

Orozco received a traditional European or academic art education at the San Carlos Academy, where he copied plaster casts and photographs. However, one of his teachers at the academy was Gerardo Murillo, a politically rebellious painter who took the Nahautl (indigenous Indian) name Dr. Atl. Dr. Atl had traveled to Europe to see French Impressionist work as well as fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian frescoes, including the work of Michelangelo. (See Electronic and Other Resources for more on Michelangelo.) In addition to his knowledge of European art, Dr. Atl was steeped in the art history of ancient Mexico, including the work of the Aztecs, Olmecs, and Maya. Orozco wrote that "Dr. Atl carried in his hands the rainbow of the impressionists and all the audacities of the School of Paris." (Edwards, 1966, p. 169)

Although Orozco was familiar with the work of the Impressionists, he did not adopt their style. He wrote: "I preferred black and the colors exiled from Impressionist palettes." (Ashton, 1990, p. 588) Orozco also rejected what he saw as Diego Rivera's folkloric, nationalistic style. He wrote: "Painting in its higher form and painting as a minor folk art differ essentially in this: the former has invariable universal traditions from which no one can separate himself...the latter has purely local traditions." (Ashton, 1990, p. 590)

In the 1920s an American woman named Alma Reed was a great patron of the work of Orozco. Reed and another patron, Eva Sikeliaros, helped Orozco get his work shown in New York. Sikeliaros's interest in ancient Greece influenced Orozco's choice of a Greek god as the subject of his mural at Pomona College. (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 28)

Orozco's Prometheus was the first mural painted by one of Los Tres Grandes in the United States. In 1932 David Alfaro Siqueiros painted the still-controversial America Tropical on Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles and Diego Rivera painted his Man at the Crossroads in Rockefeller Center, which Rockefeller ordered removed from the wall.

Viewpoints for Interpretation

What can I find out about what the artwork meant to people when and where it was made and what it means to people now?

Art Maker

Why did the art maker want the artwork to look the way it does?

In 1929, just a year before painting Prometheus, José Clemente Orozco wrote: "The highest, the most logical, the purest form of painting is the mural. It is, too, the most disinterested form, for it cannot be made a matter of private gain: it cannot be hidden away for the benefit of a certain privileged few. It is for the people. It is for ALL." (Rochfort, 1993, p. 40)

In his own interpretation of Prometheus, Orozco explained why he included other figures in the mural: "There were two real matters in the scene: Prometheus and the crowd…a crowd like you see anywhere." (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 28)

Orozco's philosophy and worldview also affected the way his work looked. According to Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros, "For Orozco, the struggles and events of history were all part of a single conflict in which the possibilities of progress vie with the pressing forces of reaction, greed, power and corruption in a never-ending circular sequence, in which no single construction or narrative can be dominant. (Rochfort, 1993, p. 99)

Artworld Viewer

How did the person(s) for whom the artwork was made (for example, a patron, user, or other viewer of the time) understand it?

José Pijoan, an art historian at Pomona College, was largely responsible for bringing Orozco to Pomona. After Orozco rejecting several ideas suggested by Pijoan for the mural, Orozco agreed to use Prometheus as his subject. Pijoan had proposed: "Why not Prometheus, the giant, carrying fire and burned by his discovery? Of course Michelangelesque in style. Around him people of different kinds receiving in different qualities that fire." (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 29) Pijoan made arrangements for Orozco's work without authorization from the college, and it is not clear whether Orozco was ever paid for his work. (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 40)

Prometheus was well received when it was unveiled. A brochure from Pomona College stated: "The skills with which Orozco scaled the composition to its architectural environment was particularly applauded. In a Time magazine interview in 1930, architect Spaulding [the architect of Frary Hall, who first suggested Orozco for the mural] was asked how he liked the mural: he responded: 'I feel as though the building would fall down if the fresco were removed.'" (Harth, no date)

Students were strong supporters of Orozco's work. Recalling watching the work in progress, the president of the freshman class wrote in the college newspaper: "I remember how thrilling it was to be there at the creation-to see the main theme evolve and then the subordinate themes and to be impressed as we were by the wonderful symbolism of it all." (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 42)

Art critic Arthur Millier, praising Prometheus in the Los Angeles Times in 1930, wrote: "Orozco had energized that wall with his sublime conception of Prometheus bearing fire to cold, longing humanity, until it lives as probably no wall in the United States today....Actually it [the mural] brings to us a bit of the most significant art outburst of our time. The esthetic experiments of modern Paris are trifling matters compared to the Mexican wall paintings of the last nine years." (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 42)

Cultural Understanding

How was the artwork understood within the culture in which it was made?

In 1967 art historian Antonio Rodriguez wrote of Prometheus:

> In 1930 Orozco started work on a theme he was to repeat on several occasions in various forms: he painted an enormous Prometheus in the act of stealing the sacred fire from the gods, in Pomona College in California. This Prometheus, however, does not put men on the way to knowledge, nor does he open their eyes to the fire. The people in the picture implore and wait in vain. The life-giving force abstracted from the gods is denied them....Orozco's Prometheus appears more a rebel angel who, instead of bringing fire to man, brings down on them the divine curse. (Rodriguez, 1967, p. 312)

Orozco does not present the bringing of new technology to humankind as a clear good. His Prometheus can be seen as a caution against the dangers of technological developments of the early twentieth century.

The universal struggles of human existence seem evident in many of Orozco's paintings. (See Electronic and Other Resources for additional works by Orozco.) People, rather than landscapes or surroundings, dominate his work. Some viewers see the figure of Prometheus as a reference to Christ on the cross. Both Prometheus and Christ can be seen as forces for the "destruction of existing orders and the necessity of creating new and superior ones." (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 16) In Orozco's mural some people are receptive to Prometheus's gift; others remain oblivious to it.

Other Viewpoints

Are there other people's viewpoints you want to consider? If so, whose?

Among the many groups whose viewpoints on Prometheus might be enlightening are students at Pomona College, fans of Greek mythology, today's technology enthusiasts, and the cafeteria workers who work in Frary Hall.

The present president of Pomona College has referred to Prometheus as "a work of historical importance" and "a precious resource of the College." (Hurlburt, 1989, p. 42)

Connections among Artworks

What can I find out about connections between this artwork and other artworks?

Style

How does this artwork look like other artworks?

José Clemente Orozco's style is somewhat abstract. His paintings depict subject matter (predominantly human beings) without detail using simple, bold shapes and strong colors. Such attention to form is shared by many modern artists of the twentieth century. Orozco's slashing brush strokes and "bleak" subject matter are characteristics shared with the work of German Expressionists such as Max Beckmann. Art historian Desmond Rochfort describes Orozco's paintings as having an "eerie stillness, in which the implicit violence of movement is frozen in time by monumentalism." (Rochfort, 1993, p. 42)

Influence

How did earlier artworks influence this artwork? How did/might it influence later artworks?

Orozco wrote of passing José Guadalupe Posada's workshop going to and from school and stopping to watch through the window as the printer worked. Orozco's use of contrasting light and dark may have been influenced by Posada's black-and-white caricature work.

In New York, Orozco "painted machinery and urban construction in a manner that recalls Cubism and Fauvism, styles he surely encountered in museums, galleries and magazines in New York." (Ashton, 1990, p. 596) He disliked Picasso and was more likely influenced by the American Precisionist painters Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth. Orozco once said, "The only true American artists are those who paint machines." (Ashton, 1990, p. 596)

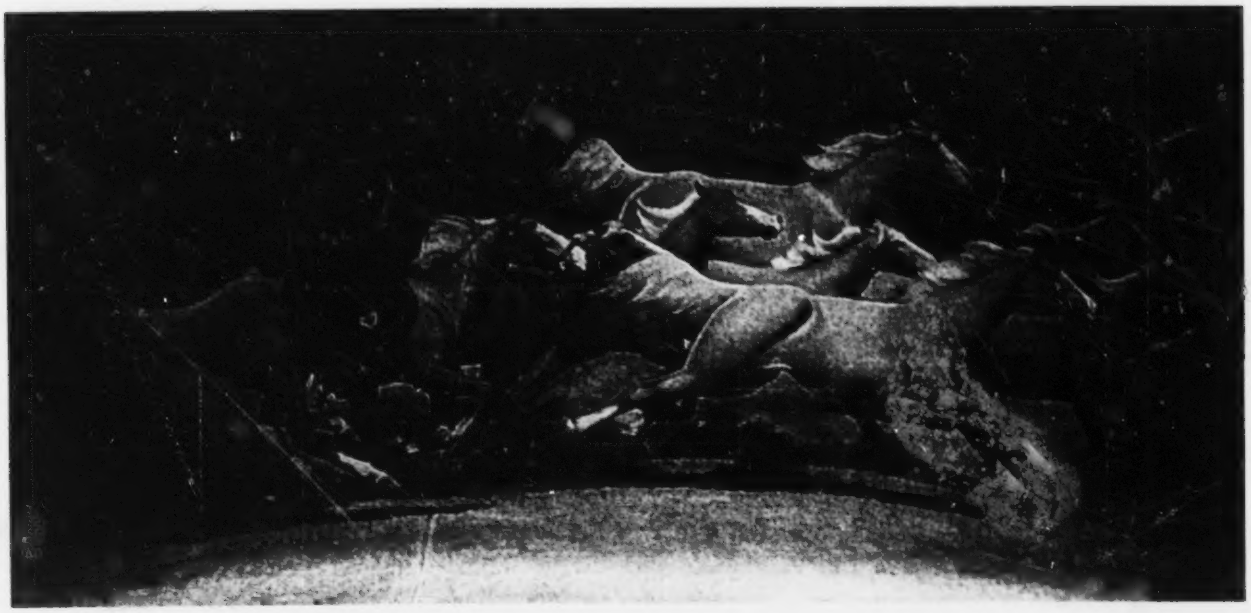
While working at the New School of Social Research, Orozco met Thomas Hart Benton and Benton's young student Jackson Pollock, whose early work was influenced by Orozco.

Themes

What general ideas help connect this artwork to other artworks?

Jos&EACUTE; Clemente Orozco said: "My one theme is Humanity; my one tendency is EMOTION TO A MAXIMUM." (Ashton, 1990, p. 606)

Powerful human emotion has been a theme for many painters over the centuries. Other artists who have addressed the theme include Malaquías Montoya, Ben Shahn, Käthe Kollwitz, Edvard Munch, Francisco Goya, and many more.



Maynard Dixon, Palomino Ponies

Mexican American Murals

Making a Place in the World

Key Artwork: Palomino Ponies

Maynard Dixon
(1875-1946)
Palomino Ponies
1942
oil on canvas
7 x 14 ft.
Canoga Park Post Office, Canoga Park, California

Following the end of the Great Depression and in the midst of World War II, California artist Maynard Dixon painted Palomino Ponies, a mural that hangs in the Canoga Park Post Office on the outskirts of Los Angeles County. The mural depicts a dreamy and idealized view of a free and wild West and is the last major work of an artist who helped build in the minds of Americans an image of wide-open spaces and the men and women who lived there.

The information below provides extensive information about the imagery, history, and key issues of Palomino Ponies.

Information about the Art Maker or Artwork

What can I find out about the art maker or artwork?

Art Maker

Who made the artwork? What are the circumstances of the art maker's life?

Maynard Dixon was born in Fresno, California, in 1875 (Fresno is two hundred miles north of Los Angeles in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley). Although Dixon lived mostly in California, he traveled extensively throughout the western United States.

Dixon began drawing at the age of six. When he was eighteen, he moved to San Francisco, where he briefly attended the California School of Design. He soon found success as an illustrator and established a studio. His commissions included illustrations for books as well as for such local and national newspapers and magazines as the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Francisco Examiner, Sunset Magazine, Life, and the Saturday Evening Post. Dixon's commercial work also included outdoor billboards and magazine advertisements.

After the San Francisco earthquake and fire destroyed his studio in 1906, Dixon made his first trip to New York and lived there from 1907 to 1913. He continued to be successful as an illustrator and was elected to the New York Society of Illustrators. He also pursued work as a painter; several of his canvases were accepted in the 1912 annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design. While in New York, Dixon met other artists, including Charles M. Russell and Robert Henri.

Illustrations of the West that Dixon saw in New York were growing increasingly stereotyped and were not based on experience. "I'm being paid to lie about the West," he said. "I'm going back home where I can do honest work." (Goetzmann and Goetzmann, 1986, p. 322) On his return, Dixon won a bronze medal at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition, where he exhibited with Marsden Hartley, Stuart Davis, Charles Sheeler, Charles Demuth, John Marin, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse.

After 1921 Dixon engaged less in commercial art activities and became more interested in modern art. Through the years he exhibited in many galleries, museums, academic institutions, and international exhibitions. During the Depression, when few could afford to buy easel paintings, he turned his attention to mural making. He painted such works in hotels, restaurants, public buildings, ocean liners, colleges, museums, and libraries.

Dixon was active in the artistic community of California; he helped form the California Society of Artists. Through the years he taught at the California School of Fine Arts, won art prizes, and helped form the Art Students League of San Francisco in 1935.

Dixon was married three times. His first wife, Lillian West Tobey, was a painter who also worked in metal and leather. They were married from 1905 to 1917 and had one daughter. From 1920 to 1937 Dixon was married to the photographer Dorothea Lange, with whom he had two sons. In 1937 he married Edith Hamlin, a painter, who sometimes assisted him in his work.

By the time he painted Palomino Ponies, Dixon was more than seventy years old, and it was his last major work. He suffered from asthma throughout his life and preferred the dry western climate. In his later years Dixon spent summers in Mount Carmel, Utah, and winters in Tucson, Arizona, where he died in 1946.

Subject Matter

What subject matter (people, places, or things) does the artwork depict, if anything?

Palomino Ponies shows seven light-colored horses galloping toward the right across a dusty, featureless plain, chased by a rider on a saddled and bridled horse. The rider—a bearded vaquero (cowboy) wearing a sombrero, short jacket, shirt, pants with chaps, and boots with spurs—leans forward in a one-hand ride. A lariat is attached to the vaquero's saddle. The ponies in the mural are palominos, a breed of light-skinned horses with even lighter manes that were raised on the earliest ranches in the San Fernando Valley, where the mural is located.

Technical Features

How was the artwork made? (tools, materials, and processes)

Dixon painted Palomino Ponies with oil on canvas. The canvas was shaped to fit the space around a door frame in the Canoga Park Post Office and glued directly onto the wall. His wife, Edith Hamlin, assisted him in painting the mural. Dixon worked on the design for over a year.

Art historian Donald Hagerty has described Dixon's general way of working:

> He…laid out the canvas, usually in charcoal, confirming the drawing in a delicate painted line (oil color diluted with paint thinner and turpentine), and afterwards dusting off any residual charcoal. Light washes in dilute color might be added as an underpainting, indicating dark and light patterns. Maynard would then paint rapidly over the entire canvas as he developed the image. The paint was generally thin, and often allowed the texture of the canvas to show through. His palette encompassed sharp, clear colors, almost unmixed, but dry and rather harsh, laid down in bold brushstrokes. Sometimes he removed large areas of fresh paint, and started again, but rarely worked over a fresh-painted area after the first day. (Hagerty, 1993, p. 210)

Sensory Elements

What visual elements do I see in the artwork? (line, color, shape, light and dark, texture, mass, and space)

In Palomino Ponies Dixon used a variety of low-intensity (dull), light, warm colors against a blue sky. He created a texture on the surface of the ground by slightly varied small areas of color. He made the horses and rider seem solid by modeling their forms (gradually changing the values—lights and darks). Because the horses run perpendicular to the viewer's line of sight, not in perspective into deep space, the illusion of depth in Palomino Ponies is quite shallow.

Formal Organization

How do the elements in the artwork work together? (For example, are parts repeated, balanced, emphasized, contrasted?)

The composition of Palomino Ponies forms a gentle arch crowned by the top central horse and emphasized by the curved horizon line and curve formed by the horses' shadows on the ground. The forward psychological movement of horses to the right is balanced by the darker, detailed figure of the rider at left. The blue negative shape of the sky complements the warm figures of the horse and rider.

Reproduction

How is the reproduction (digitized or printed image) different from the original artwork? (size, angle of view, surface texture, etc.)

Palomino Ponies is a mural on a post office wall in the San Fernando Valley. Viewers must look up to see it in its location above the door of the postmaster's office.

Condition

What condition (broken, restored, dirty) is the artwork in? How did it look when it was new?

Palomino Ponies is currently in good condition; it was restored twenty-five years ago and has been well cared for after more than a quarter century of neglect.

In 1969 the postmaster of the Canoga Park Post Office requested that the government clean Palomino Ponies and restore an area of the painting that had been damaged by the installation and removal of a light fixture. He sought estimates for the cost of restoration from Hamlin, Dixon's widow, who had assisted Dixon in painting the mural twenty-seven years earlier. He did not receive approval from the government for restoration, so in 1972 he requested of his superior that he be allowed to donate Palomino Ponies to Brigham Young University, which had expressed an interest in it. This threat stirred government and community interest, and in 1973 Hamlin restored the mural in the Canoga Park Post Office, where it remains today.

Contextual Information

What can I find out about when and where the artwork was made?

Natural Context

What is the natural environment like where the artwork was made? (for example, climate, landforms, natural resources)

Maynard Dixon was born in Fresno in the San Joaquin Valley of California long before the region's water projects made it as agriculturally important as it is today. The valley is dry and flat; summers are very hot, and winter temperatures can reach below freezing. Dixon traveled throughout the West during his lifetime, mostly in arid regions in the Southwest. He took lengthy horseback and buckboard (horse-drawn wagon) trips in California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. He also traveled to Idaho and Montana. The photographer Ansel Adams once commented that for Dixon, "the West was uncrowded, unlittered, unorganized, and free." (Hagerty, 1993, p. xxiii)

Functional Context

How is/was the artwork used?

Palomino Ponies was funded by the Section of Fine Arts, a division of the Treasury Department whose function was to secure "art of the best quality available for the embellishment of public buildings." (Marling, 1982, p. 30) Although financial need was one of the stated criteria for selecting artists, the finances of the artists who were hired were not closely examined. About half were not in need of relief of economic hardship.

Cultural Context

What can I determine about what people thought, believed, or did in the culture in which the artwork was made?

Dixon grew up in the farming and ranching culture of the San Joaquin Valley of California in the late nineteenth century and was acquainted with ranch life in California and across much of the Southwest. At age twenty he took a trip to Monterey, California, where he worked with local vaqueros and developed an interest in the lifestyle of the traditional Mexican American ranchers and cowboys.

Dixon linked his interest and experience with Canoga Park's past and present. In the early 1940s Canoga Park was a remote agricultural and ranching town at the western edge of Los Angeles County that was just starting to be suburbanized. In addition to ranching, the town's approximately thirty-five hundred inhabitants grew alfalfa, corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, and cantaloupes. After World War II, Canoga Park was settled by returning soldiers, their families, and people brought in by defense contractors, who set up manufacturing facilities in the area. The current population is three hundred thousand.

Artworld Context

What can I learn about the art ideas, beliefs, and activities that were important in the culture in which the artwork was made?

The Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program, which sponsored Palomino Ponies, was to some extent modeled after the Mexican mural movement of Los Tres Grandes—José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. (See Electronic and Other Resources for more about Los Tres Grandes.) In 1920 the Mexican mural movement got underway when the Mexican government began subsidizing murals that showed native subjects and events. Many Mexican muralists took a Marxist approach that glorified the working and peasant classes. A number of American artists traveled to Mexico to serve as apprentices to the Mexican muralists. One of these artists, George Biddle, wrote to President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 that this was "the greatest national school of mural painting since the Italian renaissance." (Marling, 1982, p. 31) Roosevelt became interested, and on October 14, 1934, the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department, which designed and constructed federal buildings, established its murals program.

The painters of the Treasury Department-sponsored post office murals worked at the crossroads of two not always reconcilable artworlds: the modern artworld and the local community artworld. Painters of post office murals not only had to meet "section" standards, they also were confronted with strong beliefs about art held by people in the communities where the murals were installed:

> Art created by artists—that is...strangers who made art for a living—was perceived as representing feelings and attitudes endemic only to artists. Art therefore was pitted against ordinary people's reality: art was filtered distortion of the truth. And since the truth was nothing less than the local way of life in America—the value system of the people—then art, until proven otherwise, was fated to be dishonest, elitist, unseemly, indecorous, and potentially immoral. Immorality became the popular, working definition of modernism, a label fixed willy-nilly to all sorts of contemporary painters who enjoyed some measure of critical approbation within the art establishment. (Marling, 1982, pp. 23-24)

Viewpoints for Interpretation

What can I find out about what the artwork meant to people when and where it was made and what it means to people now?

Art Maker

Why did the art maker want the artwork to look the way it does?

Dixon set forth his views on art quite explicitly when he described his response to modernism:

> Long ago (1918-19) when "modern art" (neo-impressionism, cubism, etc.) was getting underway in the US I had to make a decision. I tried some experiments in non-objective painting, pure expression and whatnot, and then took a turn in the desert to think it over. I came back with the following conclusions:
>
> 1. The artist does not start out to manufacture "art," he tries to tell something seen, sensed or imagined—to state some kind of truth.
> 2. In this sense art is language.
> 3. It should therefore be intelligible. It should have a core of common understanding.
> 4. The medium form in which it is cast should be chosen with regard to the thought or feeling to be expressed.
> 5. (And here's where a lot of the fashionable "arty" artists go wrong.) The manipulation of that medium should be such as to make it an organic part of the expression, not a thing in and for itself. (The old art-for-art-sake was therefore sterile. (Hagerty, 1993, p. 171)

Artworld Viewer

How did the person(s) for whom the artwork was made (for example, a patron, user, or other viewer of the time) understand it?

Before Dixon was twenty, his first drawings of cowboys were published in The Overland Monthly, a popular San Francisco magazine. In their pages he was referred to as "the coming rival of Frederic Remington." (Goetzmann and Goetzmann, 1986, p. 319) In 1915, Hill Tolerton, a San Francisco gallery owner and art critic, wrote:

> Do you know Maynard Dixon? He is an artist who has interpreted the West, and he has interpreted it not superficially nor casually, but profoundly and skillfully, from a knowledge that is thorough and an experience that is wide....That the artist understands the life of the West, with a very thorough and complete mastery gained from his

> years of experience and travel in the great southwest, is self-evident. His art reveals the indisputable fact that he is not painting as an onlooker or an outsider after superficial observation, or purely for commercial purposes, but from a love of the life itself, as he has himself known and lived it. (Hagerty, 1993, p. 84)

Dixon was influenced through much of his life by the multifaceted Charles Fletcher Lummis. Lummis served as editor of the magazine Land of Sunshine, was city editor of the Los Angeles Times, fought to save the California missions, served as city librarian of Los Angeles, and was the founder of Los Angeles's Southwest Museum. Nearly forty years before Dixon painted Palomino Ponies, Lummis wrote of him: "Mr. Dixon's largest talent had to do with humanity and the horse. Not a tenth of the New York artists who now practically monopolize this [American Western] work—who draw things they never saw and know nothing about—show either his [Dixon's] conscientiousness or his spirit, to say nothing of his familiarity." (Hagerty, 1993, pp. 18-19)

Cultural Understanding

How was the artwork understood within the culture in which it was made?

Historical themes were popular in post office murals sponsored through federal relief programs. They seldom dealt with Depression-era reality, instead focusing on a "commitment to one's roots...to imagery polarized sharply into wistful projections of wondrous tomorrow and wishful reminiscences of a serene yesterday." (Marling, 1982, p. 20)

Other Viewpoints

Are there other people's viewpoints you want to consider? If so, whose?

Among the many groups whose viewpoints on the mural might be enlightening are descendants of Californios (the Mexican inhabitants of California), Chicanos, California historians, palomino horse breeders, and generations of postal workers who have worked in the Canoga Park Post Office.

Connections among Artworks

What can I find out about connections between this artwork and other artworks?

Style

How does this artwork look like other artworks?

Maynard Dixon borrowed some of his ideas from the Cubists. For example, the two-dimensional rather than deep-space composition in Palomino Ponies reflects a Cubist idea. Dixon did not, however, adopt all the stylistic conventions of Modernism. Because of his early experience as a magazine illustrator, his paintings maintained a graphic, easily read, narrative style similar to that of other such illustrators as Norman Rockwell, N.C. Wyeth, and Maxfield Parrish. His work might be called simplified realism or Cubist realism.

In his Masterpieces of Western American Art, art historian Gray Sweeney included Dixon's work in the company of other well-known artists of the West such as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, Thomas Cole, George Catlin, Charles Russell, and Frederic Remington. (Sweeney, 1991) (See Electronic and Other Resources for works by Bierstadt and Moran.) The authors of The West of the Imagination refer to Dixon as "surely the most original of all the California painters, and one of the most distinctive of Western illustrators." (Goetzmann and Goetzmann, 1986, p. 319)

Influence

How did earlier artworks influence this artwork? How did/might it influence later artworks?

As a boy, Dixon studied romantic illustrations by Frederic Remington and Howard Pyle in popular magazines. Dixon's years in New York brought him into contact with Modernist painters such as Robert Henri, Rockwell Kent, John Sloan, and George Bellows. In New York he also met Charles Russell, with whom he shared ideas.

Both Dixon and his second wife, the photographer Dorothea Lange, used a flat surface treatment and bold compositional style. (See Electronic and Other Resources for more on Dorothea Lange.) It is not clear who might have influenced whom. The influence of Dixon's style continues in the work of twentieth-century Western landscape painters. "In his work are the precursors of the sparse and arid rock-, cloud-, land, and desertscapes vocabulary developed by a number of artists—from Georgia O'Keeffe, Louis Seigrist, and Conrad Buff to Helen Frankenthaler, Beth Ann Schwartz, Merrill Mahaffey, and Ed Mell." (Hagerty, 1993, p. xxv)

Themes

What general ideas help connect this artwork to other artworks?

Palomino Ponies expresses an action theme. Other artists who have concerned themselves with portraying action include Eugéne Delacroix, Peter Paul Rubens, Edgar Degas (in his racing paintings), George Bellows, and Frank Romero. (See Electronic and Other Resources for work by Frank Romero.)

Palomino Ponies also has a somewhat idealized historical theme. Other artists who have painted idealized historical themes include Jacques-Louis David, Benjamin West, Diego Rivera, and many more.

Mexican American Murals

My Place

Lesson Overview

By examining the works of four contemporary Chicano muralists, students are introduced to the concept of place. They will explore places where and people with whom they feel at home. The artists created their works for existing places that dictated the formats they chose. By studying the Chicano artists' works, students learn that the outside shape of a two-dimensional artwork is called its format and that formats can have many different shapes. The students experiment with placing shapes in different arrangements within different formats. Then, using clippings from magazines and newspapers, they select a format and make a collage that expresses their own place in the world.

Objectives

Students:

1. understand that people live in physical places, like cities or the countryside, and also in social places, that is, among various groups of people (social science)
2. identify images that are characteristic of various physical places, such as deserts, mountains, shores, plains, cities, farms, and suburbs (social science)
3. identify images (things you can see) that are associated with particular groups of people, such as uniforms and sports teams, instruments and musicians, kitchen utensils and cooks, sacred ceremonies and religious people, certain treasured objects and people with strong traditions, etc. (social science)
4. understand that the format, or outside shape of a two-dimensional artwork, can take various forms, such as a square, horizontal rectangle, vertical rectangle, circle, or triangle (art making/art criticism)
5. experiment with the placement of shapes within various formats (art making)

6. make a collage that communicates their own ideas about places they belong (art making)

The attached Assessment Guides can be used to determine the level of mastery your students have achieved in reaching these objectives.

Preparation

Read through the information provided about each of the seven key artworks introduced in this unit, particularly the materials on the four Chicano muralists (Baca, Cervántez, Romero, and Yepes). Read through the lesson plan and optional activities, making adaptations for your own teaching style, your particular students, and the availability of computer equipment and facilities. Assemble necessary resources. Review the vocabulary list. Check out student collages. See the ArtsEdNet resources list for suggestions of Internet printouts you may want to assemble for students' use in making collages.

Time Requirements

Teachers who have field-tested this lesson report that it takes varying lengths of time-often several class sessions-depending on their teaching style, the age of the students, and available resources. There are two separate but coordinated activities within this lesson.

Decide how many sessions will be required to teach these two activities and then decide whether you want to plan additional sessions for any of the proposed optional activities.

Activities: My Place

Basic Activities

- Part I: Places: An Introduction
- Part II: Selecting Formats and Placing Shapes

Optional Activities

- Theme Introduction for Younger Students
- Cut-Paper Format and Placement Experiment
- Map Reading and Physical Geography
- Local History
- Story for Interested Students
- Many Additional Curriculum Ideas Related to the Theme of Place

Assessment Guides

Basic Activity: Part I - Places: An Introduction

As students participate in the discussion of the theme of place, use the guide below to assess the level of their understanding. If only a few students participated in the discussion or if their responses were minimal, you may want to implement some of the suggested optional activities.

Beginner: Students can name various physical places.

Competent: Students can name various physical places as well as groups of people within which one can find a place.

Advanced: Students can name various physical places as well as groups of people within which one can find a place. Students also can identify images associated with both physical places and groups of people.

Basic Activity: Part II- Selecting Formats and Placing Shapes

Use the guide below to assess the level of student understanding during the discussion of the artworks in the Selecting Formats and Placing Shapes activity. Also use it to assess the students' collages and their statements about the collages.

Beginner: Students can describe the format of a two-dimensional artwork.

Competent: Students can describe the format of and placement of shapes within a two-dimensional artwork.

Advanced: Students can describe the format of and placement of shapes within a two-dimensional artwork. Students also can explain how the format of and placement of shapes within an artwork contribute to its meaning.

Computer Equipment and Facilities

The My Place activities can be valuable to you as a teacher even if you don't have Internet access in your classroom. Read through the lesson plan for ideas you can adapt for use in your classroom. Each lesson has its own minimal and optimal computer requirements.

Minimal Computer Requirements

Make color printouts or printouts on overhead transparencies of key images linked within the activities section of the lesson plan. Check Electronic and Other Resources for additional Web sites from which you might want to consider printing out information to supplement your instruction.

Optimal Computer Requirements

If you have Internet-connected computer-display facilities, you may want to bookmark key images before class. Determine which links you will utilize during the lesson and how you will present the images and information to your students.

Resources

Collect old newspapers, magazines, flyers, and brochures (include especially print materials with images of indigenous plants and animals as well as images of local buildings, streets, parks, and people in community organizations and at community events). You may want to provide multiple photocopies of some images of particular local interest. You might ask students to contribute readily available print materials, such as TV Guide, People Magazine, or Time Magazine; publications by or for students; or publications of local or regional interest, such as Los Angeles Magazine, Sunset Magazine, or the Los Angeles Times Magazine. If you or your students have Internet access and a printer, you can supplement your collection by printing out images posted on the Internet, especially images available from LA Culture Net at http://www.lacn.org/

- scissors
- white glue or glue sticks
- twelve-by-eighteen-inch sheets of colored construction paper and white
- drawing paper
- colored markers

Optional Resources

- watercolors, brushes, and water containers
- black-and-white photocopier

Vocabulary

You may want to introduce the following vocabulary in conjunction with this lesson:

- collage
- composition
- cultures
- format
- horizontal
- image
- mural
- shores
- stereotypes
- suburbs
- vertical

Kindergarten or first-grade teachers may want to introduce the words:

- square
- rectangle
- circle
- triangle

Basic Activity: Part I
Places: An Introduction

Overview reminder:
By examining the works of four contemporary Chicano muralists, students are introduced to the concept of place. They will explore places where and people with whom they feel at home. The artists created their works for existing places that dictated the formats they chose. By studying the Chicano artists' works, students learn that the outside shape of a two-dimensional artwork is called its format and that formats can have many different shapes. The students experiment with placing shapes in different arrangements within different formats. Then, using clippings from magazines and newspapers, they select a format and make a collage that expresses their own place in the world.

Begin the lesson by introducing the idea that everyone has a place, or several places, where they feel they belong. explain that images can tell us about these places.

Ask students to think of images of places and write the names of those places on the board. examples might include a school, shopping mall, farm, apartment, beach, or city. What are some of the things they might see in those places? Write responses on the board. These might include a desk in a school, new clothes in a shopping mall, cows on a farm, or skyscrapers in a city.

Ask students to list some of the people that would be at home in these places. Record the answers, which could include students in a school, a clerk in a shopping mall, a lifeguard on a beach, or a family in an apartment.

Explain that not only do we feel at home in various places, we can also belong to, or feel comfortable within, various groups of people (for example, among young people in a club, school organization, or class; among people of a particular culture; among people who like a certain kind of music; among people who enjoy books; among skateboarders; among dancers, etc.). Ask students to think of images that remind them of various groups of people. explain that images can show people themselves or things associated with those people, such as uniforms, costumes, ceremonies, activities, or treasured objects. If you have taught the Worlds within Worlds lesson from the Understanding Artworlds unit, review or extend the ideas generated in that lesson.

Explain that through the years and across cultures, art has been one way that people have been able to express their ideas of belonging. To make this point, display the four artworks by Chicano muralists in this unit:

Judith Baca's Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine
Yreina Cervántez's La Ofrenda (The Offering)
Frank Romero's Going to the Olympics
George Yepes's Mujer del este de Los Angeles (Lady of the eastside)

Ask students to identify images within the murals that make them think of the Los Angeles area. Their responses might include freeways (Baca and Romero), images of people of Mexican heritage (Baca, Cervántez, and Yepes), cars (Romero), Dodger Stadium (Baca), and palm trees (Romero).

Next, ask students to think about places (both physical and among groups of people) where they personally feel at home or where they would like to belong now or in the future. List student responses.

Explain to students that they will be making a collage to express ideas about their own place in the world. As a first step, ask them to cut pictures from newspapers and magazines or print out pictures from the Internet that are related to those places. They will be making the collage in Part II of this activity. Discuss the pictures in class and talk about how they express students' ideas about their place in the world.

Teacher Notes: If some of your students are pressured to join gangs, this lesson provides an opportunity to discuss positive alternatives to gang membership. Encourage students to consider the positive achievements that are possible when people work together. In any discussions of particular cultural groups, ask students to avoid stereotypical descriptions people within the groups would find offensive.

Basic Activity: Part II
Selecting Formats and Placing Shapes

Define format as the outside shape of a two-dimensional (flat) artwork, such as a painting, photograph, drawing, or print. Explain that often the first decision an artist makes is a choice of format. The format of an artwork can be a square, horizontal rectangle, vertical rectangle, circle, triangle, or other shape. Once artists select their format, they must decide where to place things within it. The organization of things within an artwork is called its composition.

Display the four contemporary Chicano murals. Explain that each muralist was working on an existing structure and was thus limited in her or his choice of format.

Overview reminder:
By examining the works of four contemporary Chicano muralists, students are introduced to the concept of place. They will explore places where and people with whom they feel at home. The artists created their works for existing places that dictated the formats they chose. By studying the Chicano artists' works, students learn that the outside shape of a two-dimensional artwork is called its format and that formats can have many different shapes. The students experiment with placing shapes in different arrangements within different formats. Then, using clippings from magazines and newspapers, they select a format and make a collage that expresses their own place in the world.

- Judith Baca painted Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine on the side of a cement-lined flood channel. The artwork is 13 feet high and 35 feet wide. It is the last section of forty sections, which together make up a mural called The Great Wall of Los Angeles, which is 2,235 feet wide.

- Yreina Cervántez painted La Ofrenda (The Offering) on a supporting wall of a street bridge. The mural is 16 feet high and 52 feet wide.

- Frank Romero painted Going to the Olympics on a freeway retaining wall. The mural is 22 feet high and 103 feet wide.

- George Yepes painted Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside) on the side of a building. The mural is 23 feet high and 11 feet wide.

You may want to construct paper models showing the proportions of the formats used by each artist, making the models in a one inch to one foot scale (for example, the Baca format would be 13 by 36 inches; the Cervántez, 16 by 52 inches; Romero, 22 by 103 inches; Yepes, 23 by 11 inches). Students could match murals with their format shapes. You might even measure out a miniature Great Wall of Los Angeles format in a hallway space (13 inches by 186 feet).

Lead a discussion of the formats of the Chicano murals, focusing on the following questions: What is the general format chosen by three out of the four Chicano muralists? (horizontal rectangle) What format did Yepes choose? (vertical rectangle) Which horizontal format is proportionately the longest in relation to its height? (Romero's mural, unless you consider the complete [not posted] Great Wall of Los Angeles) Which choice of format most clearly reinforces the meaning of the mural? (Romero's very wide mural reinforces the idea of movement. The vertical format Yepes chose focuses the viewer's attention upward, reinforcing the spirituality of his mural. If you consider the entire Great Wall of Los Angeles, Baca's long mural gives a sense of the many people, places, and events that make Los Angeles what it is.) Which artists used a central element to organize the placement of parts within the format? (Yepes and Cervántez)

Explain to students that as they make their own collages showing their own place in the world, they, like the Chicano muralists, will have to make a decision about the format that they will use for their collage.

Ask students to use the clippings they collected in Part I: Places: An Introduction. Ask them to begin planning the organization of their collage by experimenting with different placements of images. Ask them to consider how the placement of shapes might affect the sense of place they are trying to express in their collage. If a photocopier is available, students can be given the option of making multiples of key shapes to repeat within their collages. They can experiment with making different arrangements on their desks or tabletops.

Offer students a choice of colored construction paper or white drawing paper on which to make a collage. Ask students to consider the format that would be the most appropriate for their collage. Ask them to consider how the format might affect the sense of place they are trying to express in their collage. You might want to ask them to show you their plan before cutting the construction or drawing paper to the selected format. Click here for samples of student collages.

After students have completed their My Place collages, ask them to write a page to display with their collage, using the My Place Collage worksheet. Younger students or students with writing difficulties might dictate their ideas for you to write.

Conclude the lesson by reading, paraphrasing, or distributing copies of the Mexican American Murals Unit Theme and by giving students an opportunity to view each other's collages. See Assessment for grading standards.

Mexican American Murals
My Place

My Place Collage Worksheet

Student's name ______________________________

Title of collage ______________________________

My collage shows ____________________ (what place?).

I feel at home there because ____________________.

OR

I would like to feel at home there because ____________________.

I chose a ____________________ (what shape?) format.

My choice of format contributes to the meaning of my collage because ____________________.

I decided to place ____________________ (which shapes?) ____________________ (where?).

My placement of shapes within my collage contributes to the meaning of my collage because ____________________.

Optional Activity
Theme Introduction for Younger Students

You may want to prepare images and labels of different places where people might feel at home, such as deserts, seashores, farms, schools, and cities, as well as images that might remind students of those places, such as cacti in the desert, boats by the shore, cows on a farm, books at school, or skyscrapers in cities. Ask students to sort the images and labels on a felt board.

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Optional Activity
Cut-Paper Format and Placement Experiment

Preparation

Cut the following shapes from assorted colors of construction paper. These are for students' use:

- large shapes to show format (for example, square, circle, triangle, rectangle, etc.).
- multiple small shapes for placement (for example, square, circle, triangle, rectangle, moon shape, star shape, diamond, semicircle, etc.). If a die cutter is available, you can provide multiple copies of a variety of interesting shapes, such as letters, dollar signs, or light bulbs. Perhaps you can ask an aide, older student, or parent volunteer for help in cutting shapes. Store duplicates of shapes in plastic zipper bags for easier distribution and storage.

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Prepare an extra large set of format and placement shapes to use to model format selection and shape placement for students. Cut extra large format shapes from butcher paper.

Provide white glue. You may want to cover desks or tables with newspaper.

Model Selecting Format and Placing Shapes

Model decision making about format and placement, using extra large format and placement shapes. Try different formats with different placements, asking students to help you choose which format to use and how to place the shapes within it.

Demonstrate:

- different ways to balance the organization of shapes
- how one shape can be repeated within an organization
- how a center of interest can be created with the careful placement of shapes.

Student experimentation with Formats and Placement

Ask students to choose one format shape and a collection of small shapes for organizing within their format.

Ask students to experiment with different placements, trying at least three different organizations before selecting the one they like best. Ask them to consider balance, repetition, and center of interest as they rearrange shapes within their format.

Halfway through the working time, ask students to exhibit their best organization of shapes to nearby classmates, asking them for suggestions.

Next, ask students to select a second format shape upon which to place the same small shapes, noticing how the format affects their choices about placement.

After the class has experimented with two formats, ask students to finalize their decisions by choosing one format and gluing shapes to it in their best organization.

Alternative Group Activity

After demonstrating balance, repetition, and center of interest, divide your students into small groups and provide each group with extra large format shapes and thirty small shapes.

Give the groups fifteen minutes to work together to agree on the placement of the shapes within the format.

Next, tape a worksheet to each group's large format. Ask students to circulate around the room and, without touching the placements, discuss and rate each group's selection and use of a format shape as well as how each group used balance, repetition, and center of interest as they placed shapes within the format.

Primary Level Adaptation

For kindergarten and first grade, limit choice to four basic shapes (circle, triangle, square, and rectangle) in three sizes (small, medium, and large). emphasize comparative vocabulary (small, medium, and large) and locational vocabulary (overlapping, inside, outside, foreground, and background).

Optional Activity
Map Reading and Physical Geography

As a way of explaining the idea of making a place in the world, have students experiment with reading a map and exploring the physical geography of their community, state, nation, and world.

Students can:

- describe the location of their classroom within the school,
- use a street map to locate other neighborhood places or nearby neighborhoods,
- use a street map to locate their school within the town or city,
- use state, national, and world maps to locate their town or city within larger areas,
- identify map markings indicating major land forms (mountains, rivers, lakes, oceans, deserts, etc.) on state, national, and world maps,
- use print or electronic resources to identify plants and animals indigenous to various geographic areas.

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By examining the works of four contemporary Chicano muralists, students are introduced to the concept of place. They will explore places where and people with whom they feel at home. The artists created their works for existing places that dictated the formats they chose. By studying the Chicano artists' works, students learn that the outside shape of a two-dimensional artwork is called its format and that formats can have many different shapes. The students experiment with placing shapes in different arrangements within different formats. Then, using clippings from magazines and newspapers, they select a format and make a collage that expresses their own place in the world.

Discussion Question for Beginners:

- What did you see on your way to school today?

You may want to work with students to create a picture file of the school's geographic area. Some students may not have had direct experience with local plants and animals. Perhaps someone from a nearby nature group, zoo, botanical garden, college, or university would agree to bring live plants and animals to your classroom.

Optional Activity
Local History

Students can investigate major features that characterize the local community. Holidays, when extended families get together, are excellent times for students to talk with relatives from other generations about their lives. Coordinate with social science classes. For example, you may want to discuss state history with fourth graders.

Overview reminder:
By examining the works of four contemporary Chicano muralists, students are introduced to the concept of place. They will explore places where and people with whom they feel at home. The artists created their works for existing places that dictated the formats they chose. By studying the Chicano artists' works, students learn that the outside shape of a two-dimensional artwork is called its format and that formats can have many different shapes. The students experiment with placing shapes in different arrangements within different formats. Then, using clippings from magazines and newspapers, they select a format and make a collage that expresses their own place in the world.

Groups might seek information and report on:
- major landmarks or architectural sites in the community, or
- prominent men and women who contributed to the development of the community within various periods in history, for example:
  - before the arrival of Europeans
  - when California was part of colonial New Spain
  - when California was part of Mexico
  - from Gold Rush days to the Civil War
  - at the close of the nineteenth century through the turn of the twentieth century
  - from World War I through World War II
  - in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Students might interview community residents in three major groups (those with zero to five years in residence, six to nineteen years in residence, and twenty plus years in residence) to seek information and report on:
- major landmarks or architectural sites in the community,
- how the community has changed during their period of residence,
- what changes they foresee in the next five, ten, or twenty years, and
- what changes they would like to see for their community.

Optional Activity
Story for Interested Students

Fee of the Meadow People is a short story about how a young girl earns her place among her people through her own courage.

For younger students, in preparation for this activity, you can make word cards and visual clues (character silhouette cards) to introduce characters and vocabulary (just those words that may be beyond the students' developmental level and that are important to the content taught).

Present the story. Kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers may wish to tell the story using gestures and voices. Teachers of older students may wish to provide students with a copy, allowing volunteers to read out loud.*

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Before reading the story aloud, ask students to make a list of physical places as they listen. After the story, ask students to describe the place where Fee and the Meadow people live. Then ask them about the special place among her people that Fee was initiated into at the end of the story. Also ask about the visual signs of her new place.

Young students might demonstrate their understanding of chronological sequencing by illustrating events (five for very young students, eight for older students) and pasting them in order on a paper strip. Emphasize left to right progression with kindergarten students.

At the web site
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Place/Image/meadow.html
you may view a school mural of Fee of the Meadow People painted by seventh-grade students.

Optional: Students can make a drawing from their imagination of their favorite place in the story.

*Storytelling adaptations for various grade levels are based on recommendations by Lorna Corlett, Liberty Elementary School, Paradise Valley School District, Phoenix, Arizona.

Mexican American Murals

Influences from the Past

Lesson Overview

Students consider how people and events from the past can influence later generations. In general, students analyze influences within their own community and art making;specifically, they consider how earlier murals may have influenced the work of contemporary Chicano muralists in Los Angeles.

Included with this lesson plan are samples of student work that resulted from this lesson.

Objectives

Students:

1. identify historical events and ideas that have influenced later events and ideas (history)
2. identify influences on their own making (art making)
3. understand that artists almost always use ideas of artists from earlier times, that is, earlier artists influence later artists (art history)
4. compare contemporary artworks with earlier artworks to find possible influences (art history/art criticism)
5. seek ideas (influences) for their own art making in artworks from the past (art making)

The attached Assessment Guides can be used to determine the level of mastery your students have achieved in reaching these objectives.

Preparation

Print out and read through the information provided about each of the seven key artworks introduced in this unit. You may want to prepare packets of selected information about the Baca, Cervántez, Romero, and Yepes murals for your students. See especially:

- information about the Art Maker, listed under Information about the Art Maker or Artwork
- information about the Artworld Context, listed under Contextual Information
- information about Influence, listed under Connections among Artworks.

Read through the lesson plan and optional activities, making adaptations for your own teaching style, your particular students, and the availability of computer equipment and facilities. Assemble necessary resources. Review the vocabulary list. Check out student writing.

You may want to use ideas from the Using and Understanding Art from Other Artworlds lesson to help students understand some of the problems that can arise when artists borrow ideas from art made in other artworlds.

Time Requirements

Teachers who have field-tested this lesson report that it takes varying lengths of time-often several class sessions-depending on their teaching style, the age of the students, and available resources. There are two separate but coordinated activities within this lesson.

Decide how many sessions will be required to teach these two activities and then decide whether you want to plan additional sessions for any of the proposed optional activities.

Activities: Influences from the Past

Basic Activities

- Part I: Influences on Me and My Art
- Part II: How Earlier Art Influences Later Art

Optional Activities

- Discussion of Mural Sites
- History Extension Ideas

Assessment Guides

Basic Activity: Part I
Influences on Me and My Art

Use the guide below to assess students' paragraphs written about influences on their own art.

Beginner: Students can name a general kind of art that they like, specific artwork they like, or specific artist whose work they like.

Competent: Students can name a general kind of art that they like, specific artwork they like, or specific artist whose work they like and can explain how that kind of art, artwork, or artist has influenced their own art making.

Advanced: Students can name and explain in detail several influences on their own artwork.

Basic Activity: Part II
How Earlier Art Influences Later Art

During your discussion with students about the three earlier murals, use the guide below to assess students' ability to get ideas for their own art making from others.

Beginner: Students can point to at least one part of an artwork that they like.

Competent: Students can point to and describe in words at least one part of an artwork that they like.

Advanced: Students can point to and describe in words at least one part of an artwork that they like and can explain how they might use something like that part in their own art.

During discussion with students about possible influences of the earlier murals (or similar murals) on 1980s Chicano mural painters, use the guide below to assess students' ability to imagine how earlier artworks might influence artists living in later times.

Beginner: Students can speculate about the interests of and influences on an artist.

Competent: Students can speculate about the interests of and influences on Chicano mural painters.

Advanced: Students can speculate about the interests of and influences on Chicano mural painters that may have been stimulated or reinforced by earlier artworks.

Computer Equipment and Facilities

The Influences from the Past activities can be valuable to you as a teacher even if you don't have Internet access in your classroom. Read through the lesson plan for ideas you can adapt for use in your classroom. Each lesson has its own minimal and optimal computer requirements.

Minimal Computer Requirements

Make color printouts or printouts on overhead transparencies of key images linked within the activities section of the lesson plan. Check Electronic and Other Resources for additional Web sites from which you might want to consider printing out information to supplement your instruction.

Optimal Computer Requirements

If you have Internet-connected computer-display facilities, you may want to bookmark key images before class. Determine which links you will utilize during the lesson and how you will present the images and information to your students.

Resources

Explore local resources to find historical information about events in your community's past and biographical information about prominent people who have affected life in your community (such as government officials, business leaders, community organizers, and others). Such materials are often available from historical societies and museums.

Optional Resources

Jaclyn Lopez Garcia Web site. See Electronic and Other Resources to see the work of a Chicana photographer who has posted a Web site that you may choose to use to inspire students' thinking about influences in their lives and art. She has posted several of her artworks as well as a photographic essay on childhood influences.

Vocabulary

You may want to introduce the following vocabulary in conjunction with this lesson:

- angular
- Chicano
- contemporary
- cultural roots
- dramatic scene
- geometric
- heir
- influence
- Los Tres Grandes
- Mesoamerica
- milagros
- mural
- noble
- prehistoric
- regional pride
- time line

Influences on My Art: Student Work

These essays were written by sixth-grade students of Susan Birney and Ellen Hall in the GATE (gifted) English program at Huntington Middle School, San Marino Unified School District, San Marino, California. After studying the work of four Chicano muralists from Los Angeles, the students identified influences on their own artwork.

Influences on My Art
Sample 1

I have had many influences on my art, for example; my dad, my art teachers, and the works of Monet, and Van Gogh. They have influenced me in many ways in my life. My dad influenced me to look at objects and make sure I am looking at it in the same perspective, not in a changing perspective. My art teacher taught me about all the different types of art work, for instance; painting, carving, modeling clay, oil pastels, and a lot more. Van Gogh influenced me to draw flowers and each flower has to be different. They should not be all the same. Monet influenced me by using a variety of colors and using them over again to make sure they do not look odd.

My two favorite types of artwork are by Monet and Van Gogh. Monet did a painting on "Water Lilies." He used the colors very well. My other favorite is a flower picture by Van Gogh, called "Sunflowers." Now, I like drawing flowers in vases or just flowers. This picture also influenced me to try different art styles. It looks as it looks in nature.

My favorite way to create art is with oil pastels, even through I cannot use them very often. My art teacher influenced me by letting me do many drawings using oil pastels. Oil pastels are very fun to use because you can mix them together or smear them to make it look lighter. That is why I like using oil pastels better.

The first time I drew something was because of my dad. My dad had influenced me because when I watched him draw, I thought it looked really fun and his pictures were really good. That is when I got really interested in art. My sister influenced me because when I was older, I always had to draw better than she did. This encouraged me to be a better artist.

I do not use models for anything, except for flowers. I use the models to help me choose which kinds of flowers to use. I like drawing roses. I learned that before I start drawing something, I have to look at it more closely and pick out all the details. I have had a lot of influences on my artwork to have it as good as it is now.

—Emily

Influences on My Art
Sample 2

There are many things that influence me to draw, sketch and paint the way I do. For example, there are the still-life paintings of Vincent Van Gogh. My favorite painting is "Sunflowers" which is so delightful and cheery that you just feel like picking some sunflowers of your own.

My sister is another influence on my art. She uses the simplest ideas like a young girl reading a book wearing overalls, and transforms it into a beautiful sculpture. I have absolutely no idea how she can be so creative! Another example of how wonderful her art is and how much it motivates me is the clay pot that she made. Ever since she made that pot, I have loved to work with clay.

Another sample of the type of art that inspires me are fashion designs. The way some designers come up with their ideas simply astound and motivate me to think up my own creations of dresses, suits, gowns and accessories like purses and gloves, shoes and scarves. Versace is one of my most admired designers because of the simple lines and the straight cuts he uses on his designs. I sometimes think up designs in class while taking notes and sketch them on paper!

Basically I love simple, exciting and clever artistry that covers all styles of art from Van Gogh to Versace! There are so many things that influence the way a person can think and the way they interpret and design their own art. Luckily, I have a good taste in the way I pick the influences on my art!

—Nicolette

Influences on My Art
Sample 3

Over the course of my life, numerous things have had an influence on my artwork. I would have to say that the artist Diego Rivera has had the greatest impact. His beautiful paintings have inspired ever so many of my works; especially his work entitled "The Flower Vendor." This simple, yet beautiful, depiction of a girl and her sweet yet tiresome burden is to me a great work of art.

Many of my teachers have taught me about art and influenced my art in many ways, as well. My fine arts instructor, Mrs. Pearson, has taught me a considerable amount of things about the creation and history of art, and also how to combine colors to create new ones. Her exciting teaching methods and many projects have taught me so much about the world of art, and helped me see it in a totally new way. I really appreciate all of her help.

I particularly enjoy viewing art in museums. I enjoy museums so much because they allow me to join in first hand in the whole "art experience." Every time I visit a museum, I view something else that inspires my next creation. I occasionally get so involved in a painting that I lose track of everything around me. I am sure many other people feel the same way. I am going to be visiting the new Getty Center, a trip that I am anxiously awaiting. I can only imagine how many new works of art I will create after my visit there.

—Marisa

Influences on My Art
Sample 4

Many things/people have "influenced my art." First, I'd like to thank my dad for teaching me how to draw interesting and detailed art. I like to turn real things into cartoon-like drawings when I draw. For example: If I had to draw a rabbit, I would make it have a pretty big head and huge front teeth.

I get my ideas from magazines, posters, and comic books such as Jim Davis' Garfield comics. I like Garfield because it is funny, and I can learn a lot from it. I study how Mr. Davis enhances his pictures by making them look 3-D(dimensional), using shadows, and adding humor. Sometimes, he also lets you see things from a character's point of view. I try to include those details in most of my artwork, and they usually turn out looking pretty good. So remember, learn form a more experienced person, and you'll get by nicely (most of the time).

—Taka

Basic Activity: Part I
Influences on Me and My Art

Define influence as a person, place, or thing that affects something else. Explain that nations, communities, and other groups of people have been shaped by influences from the past.

Overview reminder:
Students consider how people and events from the past can influence later generations. In general, students analyze influences within their own community and art making; specifically, they consider how earlier murals may have influenced the work of contemporary Chicano muralists in Los Angeles.

- Today's Los Angeles has been affected by many different influences from the past, such as moviemakers leaving the East Coast and establishing a filmmaking capital in Hollywood, the building of massive water projects, manufacturers developing military production businesses during World War II, historic earthquakes and fires, and continuous immigration by people from different regions of the United States and the world.

- Popular music today has had many influences, including English singing groups and bands in the 1960s, American disco music in the 1970s, and, more recently, rap music from cities all over the country.

Explain that influences from the past have happened throughout history and in different parts of people's lives. Ask students to add to the following list of areas of life that are influenced by the past:

- In science, Galileo worked with Copernicus's ideas in astronomy and Einstein built on Newton's ideas in physics.
- In politics, civil rights workers were inspired by the efforts of Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks.
- In the legal system, U.S. law is built on English common law traditions and on Iroquois notions of confederation.
- In philosophy, Mahatma Gandhi blended Hindu and Christian ideas into his own.
- In literature, contemporary fantasy writers were influenced by the writings of the nineteenth-century French author Jules Verne.
- In modern dance, young dancers are inspired by the choreography of Isadora

Duncan and Martha Graham.

- In warfare, General George Patton learned military strategy by studying about Napoleon.
- In the labor movement, union leaders are influenced by the work of organizers such as Mother Jones.
- In sports, young basketball players are influenced by the playing of Shaquille O'Neal.
- In popular music, Elvis Presley borrowed ideas from African American blues singers and Madonna borrowed ideas from Marilyn Monroe.

Note that people can be influenced by earlier events and earlier people's ideas in many different ways.

- Later people can build on earlier ideas.
- Later people can revise earlier ideas.
- Later people can synthesize old ideas and new ideas.
- Later people can challenge or even rebel against earlier ideas.
- Later people can borrow parts from earlier ideas or events.
- Later people can be inspired by earlier ideas or events.

Lead a discussion of important people and events of the past that have influenced life in your own community. You may want to construct a time line on which you and your students post labels naming events or people or attach clippings, photos, or printouts of people and events in your community's history. Information gathered for this activity will be useful in helping students get ideas for their own murals.

Ask students to think of influences in their own lives, such as people they have known, events they have witnessed, books or movies they have read or seen, or places they have visited. For example, a student might have learned a great deal from an older brother or a grandmother; developed a new interest after having attended a competition, concert, parade, or celebration; been inspired by a novel or film; or found new direction after visiting a museum, different neighborhood or city, national park, or street fair. Ask for a few volunteers who are willing to share how various influences have affected their lives.

Ask students to think about specific influences on their own art making and to write a paragraph entitled "Influences on My Art." (samples of student writing). Provide convenient art materials, such as colored pencils, crayons, or markers, and ask students to illustrate their paragraph to show one or more influence on their art making. The following questions may by useful:

- What kind of art would you like to make? Where have you seen that kind of art before? What do you especially like about that kind of art?
- Do you have models that you use when you make art, such as comic books, cartoons, book illustrations, or fashion illustrations? What have you learned from

those models?

- Are there artworks that you've seen that inspire you or give you ideas for your own art making? Name or describe them. What do you especially like about those artworks?
- Do you know the names of any artists whose work you like and think you might be able to learn from? What do you like about the work of those artists?
- Has anyone taught you how to do something in art, for example, a family member, teacher, friend, or classmate? What have you learned from them?

Ask each student in turn to share one influence on his or her art making.

Basic Activities: Part II
How Earlier Art Influences Later Art

Tell students that in this lesson they will be studying murals and will make their own mural in a later lesson. Explain that murals are large images on exterior or interior walls. Most murals are painted, although some are made in other ways, such as in mosaic or with fabric. Perhaps the oldest paintings in the world are prehistoric murals, such as those in what is now France, Spain, and Australia. See Electronic and Other Resources for examples of murals from many different cultures and eras.

Overview reminder:
Students consider how people and events from the past can influence later generations. In general, students analyze influences within their own community and art making; specifically, they consider how earlier murals may have influenced the work of contemporary Chicano muralists in Los Angeles.

Explain that just as students have been influenced by others in their own art making, most artists are influenced by the work of earlier artists. Discuss the Chicano mural movement, which began in the 1960s in the United States and has been especially strong in Los Angeles. This movement draws on many traditions, including Mexican, European, and ancient American traditions. See Electronic and Other Resources for information on Chicano art.

Display the seven murals that are the focus of this lesson:

- Judith Baca's Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine, 1983
- Yreina Cervántez's La Ofrenda (The Offering), 1989
- Frank Romero's Going to the Olympics, 1984
- George Yepes's Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside),1989
- Unknown Maya Art Maker's/Makers' Presentation of the Heir, A.D. 79-92
- José Clemente Orozco's Prometheus, 1930
- Maynard Dixon's Palomino Ponies, 1942

Locate the seven murals on a time line. Note that the four Chicano murals were all completed in the 1980s, that two murals were painted several decades before, and that one mural is hundreds of years older than all the others. Explain that the Chicano artists may not have seen the earlier murals, but that they are likely to have seen examples that are at least somewhat similar.

Tell students that you are going to show each of the oldest three murals in turn and provide some background information on each. Explain that you will ask students to look carefully at the murals and be prepared to answer two questions. You may want to write the questions on the board or a transparency and have students write answers to both questions for each of the artworks as they are presented.

1. What ideas in the murals can I use in my own mural?
2. Why would Chicano mural painters in the 1980s be interested in a mural like this?

Display *Presentation of the Heir*, which was painted in A.D. 790-92, and share the following key information as well as any other information you judge appropriate:

- These murals cover the inside walls of three rooms in a temple in Bonampak, in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas.
- The murals, made with bright paint on wet stucco, were preserved for centuries by a layer of mineral deposits created by water seeping into the structure.
- The murals show the presentation of a royal heir and the celebration of the child's acceptance at court by nobles dressed in white. The man standing on the platform at right holds the child before the nobles.
- Before the Spanish arrived in the Americas, many complex cultures flourished at different times, among them the Olmec, Mixtec, Zapotec, Toltec, Aztec, and Maya civilizations. The Maya built and painted the walls of the temple at Bonampak.
- Maya people still live in southern Mexico and Central America.

Ask students to list parts of Presentation of the Heir that they like and might use in their own murals. For example, they might be interested in the unusual format, repetition of the figures, costumes, or division of the mural into three bands presenting, from bottom to top, words (black, linear Mayan glyphs), figures, and shapes.

Help students find possible influences of ancient Mayan painting on contemporary Chicano muralists such as Baca, Cervántez, Romero, and Yepes by raising questions such as:

- Why might Chicano painters be especially interested in ancient murals in Mexico? (Chicanos are people with cultural roots in Mexico, so ancient art from ancient Mesoamerican cultures is part of their cultural heritage.)
- The Mayan painters showed a royal child and nobles in their murals; did any of the Chicano painters show important people in their murals? (Baca's painting tells viewers that everyday people are important and should not have their neighborhood torn apart; Cervántez chose Dolores Huerta, an influential leader in the United Farm Workers union; Yepes refers to the Virgin of Guadalupe by means of the dark cloak and golden oval of light.)

Display José Clemente Orozco's *Prometheus*, painted at Pomona College in Claremont, California, in 1930. Share the following key information as well as any other information you judge appropriate:

- This fresco painting is very large, measuring 20 feet high by 28 1/2 feet wide.
- The painting shows Prometheus, a god from Greek mythology who revolted against his father and was severely punished for bringing fire to humankind. The painting can be understood as a statement about the great potential and great dangers of new technologies.
- Orozco was one of Los Tres Grandes, three famous Mexican muralists. Together with Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros, he revived mural painting at a time when most other Modern painters were making easel paintings (movable paintings made to be hung on walls). See Electronic and Other Resources for more artworks by Los Tres Grandes.
- Orozco, like the other famous Mexican muralists, created a new, Mexican art form by building on European mural-making traditions. His teacher at the San Carlos Academy of Art in Mexico City was a great admirer of Italian Renaissance muralists, such as Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. See Electronic and Other Resources for murals by Michelangelo and Leonardo. Orozco's earliest murals borrowed characteristics from Italian Renaissance murals.

Ask students to list parts of Prometheus that they like and might use in their own murals. For example, they might be interested in the unusual format, the dramatic use of angular forms, or dominant red color scheme.

Ask students why Chicano mural makers like Baca, Cervántez, Romero, and Yepes might be interested in or influenced by seeing murals by Los Tres Grandes. Help students identify possible influences by raising questions such as:

- Orozco chose a very dramatic scene as the subject matter of his mural. Which of the contemporary Chicano muralists also chose a dramatic event for subject matter? (Baca depicted the tragic division of a neighborhood as her subject.)
- Orozco chose a mythological god as the subject for his mural. Are there mythological, religious, or spiritual references in any of the contemporary Chicano murals? (Yepes's Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside) makes reference to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Cervántez's mural includes a number of religious references. To the right of Huerta's head, for example, Cervántez has painted several small metal objects, called
- milagros [miracles], which are traditionally brought to the image or figure of a saint when a prayer has been answered.)
- Orozco simplified his figures somewhat to make them more angular and geometric. Which of the Chicano muralists used even more simplified geometric shapes? (Romero painted simplified cars, palm trees, and hills. He emphasized curves.)

Display Maynard Dixon's Palomino Ponies, painted in the post office at Canoga Park, California, in 1942. Share the following key information as well as any other information you judge appropriate:

- Palomino Ponies is 7 feet high by 14 feet wide.
- Dixon, a European American, was born in California in 1875.
- Dixon chose a scene from early California history as his subject matter.
- During the 1930s and 1940s the U.S. federal government established programs to fund public art. The programs employed artists during the Great Depression and also promoted social reform and regional pride. Thousands of artists were hired between 1934 and 1943, many to paint post office murals.

Ask students to list parts of Palomino Ponies that they like and might use in their own murals. For example, they might be interested in the repetition of shapes, the relatively simple color scheme, or the action in the subject matter.

Ask students why Chicano mural makers such as Baca, Cervántez, Romero, and Yepes might be interested in or influenced by seeing Dixon's murals or other murals funded by the government in the 1930s and 1940s. Help students find possible influences shared by both government-funded 1930s and 1940s murals and contemporary Chicano muralists by raising questions such as:

- Who do you think might have supported the work of the contemporary Chicano muralists? The Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) provided support for the murals by Baca, Cervántez, and Romero. See Electronic and Other Resources for information on SPARC. Baca also received support from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Flood Control District, the Juvenile Justice Department, and the Summer Youth Employment Program as well as community organizations, businesses, corporations, and foundations.
- The federal program that supported Dixon's (and many other artists') painting of public murals was modeled after the success of the Mexican government's mural program, which supported the work of Los Tres Grandes. Do you think contemporary Chicano muralists, as well as federally funded muralists of the 1930s and 1940s might have been inspired by Los Tres Grandes?
- An idea about the excitement of early California may have inspired Dixon. Do you think Romero might have been inspired by his own idea of excitement in contemporary California?

Suggest to students that they may want to look again at all seven murals to get ideas when they make their own mural.

Use Assessment if desired for determining student standards.

Optional Activity
Discussion of Mural Sites

Display the Bonampak mural. Explain that it is one of many inside a stone structure. Describe the site as an overgrown architectural complex deep in a dense, humid, tropical rainforest in southern Mexico. The site was abandoned more than 1,300 years ago, although Lacandón Maya Indians visited the site. In 1946 a filmmaker hired by the United Fruit Company was guided to the site by two Lacandón Maya men.

Overview reminder:
Students consider how people and events from the past can influence later generations. In general, students analyze influences within their own community and art making; specifically, they consider how earlier murals may have influenced the work of contemporary Chicano muralists in Los Angeles.

The doorways to the three rooms in the structure are 5'9" tall and 3'3" wide. The rooms' walls slope together, almost touching at the top, and are completely covered with murals. Presentation of the Heir is painted on a sloping wall. Below the text that appears below the noblemen, elaborately robed dancers are painted on a vertical wall. Other paintings in the same room show dancers robing and preparing for the procession and the royal family observing the ceremony. Stone benches cover most of the floor space in the rooms in the structure, leaving only a small space in which to stand. Ask students to imagine what it would be like to travel through a rain forest and see the murals on site.

Ask students to think about the significance of the sites (locations) of the following murals:

- Judith Baca's Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine, part of a half-mile-long mural, painted below ground level in a flood control channel
- Yreina Cervántez's La Ofrenda (The Offering), painted under a overpass
- Frank Romero's Going to the Olympics, painted on a freeway wall George Yepes's Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Our Lady of the Eastside), painted on the side of a building
- José Clemente Orozco's Prometheus, painted in a university dining hall
- Maynard Dixon's Palomino Ponies, painted over a doorway in a post office

As a class discussion, or in small groups, ask students to consider the following questions about the significance of each mural's site:

- How do you suppose the site was selected?
- Do you think that the site contributes to the meaning of the mural in any way?
- Describe what you think the experience of approaching and viewing the mural might be.
- How do you think the location of the mural might affect its condition in the future?

Optional Activity
History Extension Ideas

You can develop students' understanding of historical influence in several ways.

Overview reminder:
Students consider how people and events from the past can influence later generations. In general, students analyze influences within their own community and art making; specifically, they consider how earlier murals may have influenced the work of contemporary Chicano muralists in Los Angeles.

Family Influences

Ask students to interview their parents, grandparents, or other family members, seeking information about ideas (values and beliefs) that are important within the family or events that made a difference in their relatives' lives. Students could then write a short paper about how people, events, or ideas within their family history have influenced their own lives today.

Special Interest Influences

Ask students to choose a special interest that they would like to investigate, such as chess, basketball, car racing, science fiction movies, bird watching, skateboarding, fashion, cooking, or rock and roll. Have students use available resources, such as the library or Internet, to investigate how contemporaries with their interest have been influenced by the achievements of earlier people with similar interests. For example, what basketball players inspired Shaquille O'Neal, and why; who are the earlier rock performers admired by today's popular rap performers, and why?

Influences in the Arts and Sciences

Ask students to investigate the history of a branch of their favorite school subject, such as political science, anthropology, paleontology, astronomy, mathematics, or history. Sir Isaac Newton is said to have stated that he achieved what he did because he "stood on the shoulders of giants."

Influences on My Art: Student Work

These essays were written by sixth-grade students of Susan Birney and Ellen Hall in the GATE (gifted) English program at Huntington Middle School, San Marino Unified School District, San Marino, California. After studying the work of four Chicano muralists from Los Angeles, the students identified influences on their own artwork.

Mexican American Murals

Themes and Interpretation

Lesson Overview

Students are introduced to the concept of themes and interpretation. Themes are big ideas expressed in artworks; an interpretation is a statement about the meaning of an artwork. Students learn how to evaluate whether there is evidence to support a specific interpretation of a work of art and use the theme of place to help them interpret contemporary Chicano murals.

Included with this lesson plan are samples of student work that resulted from this lesson.

Objectives

Students:

1. understand that an interpretation is a statement about what an artwork means (art criticism)
2. consider how different viewers might interpret the same artwork differently (aesthetics/art criticism)
3. understand that one definition of an interpretation is as an invitation to others to see and understand an artwork in a particular way (aesthetics)
4. understand that stronger interpretations are supported by evidence (aesthetics/critical thinking)
5. use a theme as a starting point for interpreting an artwork (art criticism)
6. look for evidence to support their interpretations of artworks (art criticism)

Following are Assessment Guides that can be used to determine the level of mastery your students have achieved in reaching these objectives.

Preparation

Read through the information provided about each of the seven key artworks introduced in this unit.

Read through the lesson plan and optional activities, making adaptations for your own teaching style, your particular students, and the availability of computer equipment and facilities.

Decide whether you will present the interpretation activity outlined in Part II: Using a Theme for Interpretation or the Interpretation Activity for Beginning or Younger Students. Assemble necessary resources. Review the vocabulary list. Check out samples of students' initial interpretations.

Time Requirements

Teachers who have field-tested this lesson report that it takes varying lengths of time-often several class sessions-depending on their teaching style, the age of the students, and available resources. There are two separate but coordinated activities within this lesson.

Decide how many sessions will be required to teach these two activities and then decide whether you want to plan additional sessions for any of the proposed optional activities.

Activities: Themes and Interpretation

Basic Activities

- Part I: Evaluating Interpretations
- Part II: Using a Theme for Interpretation

Optional Activities

- Interpretation Activity for Beginning or Younger Students
- Discussion of the Viewpoints of Insiders and Outsiders
- Coordination with Themes in Language Arts

Assessment Guides

Basic Activities: Part I
Evaluating Interpretations

Use the guide below to assess students' written or oral responses to the closing questions after your discussion of the Dixon mural.

> Beginner: Students can define an interpretation as a statement expressing what an artwork is about.
>
> Competent: Students can define an interpretation as a statement expressing what an artwork is about and can explain that strong interpretations are supported by evidence.
>
> Advanced: Students can define an interpretation as a statement expressing what an artwork is about and can explain that strong interpretations are supported by evidence. Students can also distinguish strong interpretations from weak ones and justify their evaluation.

Basic Activities: Part II
Using a Theme for Interpretation

Use the guide below to assess students' group presentations and their responses to their classmates' presentations.

> Beginner: Students can identify a theme within an artwork.
>
> Competent: Students can identify a theme within an artwork as well as evidence related to that theme.
>
> Advanced: Students can identify a theme within an artwork as well as evidence related to that theme. They can also propose and support alternative themes.

Computer Equipment and Facilities

The Themes and Interpretation lesson can be valuable to you as a teacher even if you don't have Internet access in your classroom. Read through the lesson plan for ideas you can adapt for use in your classroom. Each lesson has its own minimal and optimal computer requirements.

Minimal Computer Requirements

Make color printouts or printouts on overhead transparencies of key images linked within the activities section of the lesson plan. Check Electronic and Other Resources for additional Web sites from which you might want to consider printing out information to supplement your instruction.

Optimal Computer Requirements

If you have Internet-connected computer-display facilities, you may want to bookmark key images before class. Determine which links you will utilize during the lesson and how you will present the images and information to your students.

Resources

Make multiple color printouts or printouts on overhead transparencies of the Dixon, Baca, Cervántez, Romero, and Yepes murals or utilize Internet-connected computer-display facilities. If you choose the activity in Part II: Using a Theme for Interpretation, print out a student packet of information for these murals. Be sure to include the following five sections:

Viewpoints for Interpretation

- Art Maker
- Artworld Viewer
- Cultural Understanding
- Other Viewpoints

Connections among Artworks

- Themes

Add any other information to the packet that you think is appropriate for your students. Cut the sections apart so that each is on a separate piece of paper. Also make copies of the Group Interpretation worksheet for small groups.

Pad of Post-it Notes for each group of 4-6 students

If you choose the Interpretation Activity for Beginner or Younger Students, read the information about the Romero and Baca murals, focusing especially on the four sections listed under Viewpoints for Interpretation and the Themes section listed under Connections among Artworks. Prepare to introduce information either orally or in writing.

Vocabulary

You may want to introduce the following vocabulary in conjunction with this lesson:

- areas
- Chicano
- consistent
- contemporary
- deception
- evidence
- idealistic
- informed
- interpret
- justice
- mobile
- nationality
- spirituality
- theme
- unity
- viewer
- viewpoint
- vision

Themes and Interpretation: Student Work

These interpretations of the work of four Chicano muralists from Los Angeles were written by Roxanna May-Thayer's students at South Mountain High School, Phoenix Union High School District, Phoenix, Arizona.

Initial Interpretations of Judith Baca's Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine

> This artwork expresses the idea that the highway is a chaotic place which only embodies hostility.
> —Reva

> This artwork is about how freeways split everything apart.
> Andrew

> This artwork is about how the freeways are destroying people's unity and their homes.
> —Robert

> This artwork is about the freeway system coming through towns, destroying our houses and breaking up our family lives.
> —Jermain

Initial Interpretations of Frank Romero's Going to the Olympics

> This artwork is about everyone being the same, going in the same direction.
> —Katherine

> This artwork is about how people in L.A. like where they live and the things that go on around them.
> —Larry

> This artwork tells us that even though it might be a long way to love, after you find it, it's like a paradise.
> —Hector

This artwork expresses the idea that everyone on the road should have a heart while driving.
—Carlos

This artwork is about the love people have for their cars when they cruise. They are having a good time and they all share a common interest.
—Jesus

Poems Inspired by the Prometheus Myth and Orozco's Mural

These poems were written by sixth-grade students of Ellen Hall in the GATE (gifted) English program at Huntington Middle School, San Marino Unified School District, San Marino, California.

The Fate of the One Who Brought Fire

Prometheus brought the fire We needed most,
And for this gift he did not boast.

He saved Zeus from suffering and pain,
And for that, he did not gain.

Instead to be chained forever alone,
On a cold, jagged, hard, stone.
With the lasting pain of a bird he was to die,
on a sharp, cold rock, he did lie.

So maybe it wasn't such a great thing,
For him to help the human begin.

For him who brought fire, we do not thank,
We think of him of no higher rank.

Yet he saved our lives for all of us,
So thank him eternally, that we must.

—Felicia

Prometheus

Being a Titan, he is immortal,
And was given the gift of foresseing.
When gave mortals fire,
And refused to reveal future,

Was chained to a wall,
And attacked by a vulture.
As the bird ate his heart,
It grew right back,
So the pain would be relived.
As time went by,
Hercules came by,
And slayed the beastly bird,
Freed the reat titan,
So he could roam free again.

—Reuben

Powerful immortal
Ruler
O'
Mighty God
Enduring
The
Horrid
Ever on going
Unwanted
Suffering

—Carrie

Basic Activity: Part I
Evaluating Interpretations

Explain that when we interpret something we try to figure out what it means. An interpretation is a statement about the meaning of something. We interpret many things in life. For example:

- Politicians interpret the response of voters after speeches.
- Baseball batters interpret the movements of pitchers just before a throw.
- Students interpret the facial expressions and posture of their teachers.
- Weather forecasters interpret cloud patterns and atmospheric pressure readings.
- Police officers interpret drivers' actions behind the wheel.
- Readers interpret books.
- Listeners interpret music.
- Moviegoers interpret films.

Overview reminder:
Students are introduced to the concept of themes and interpretation. Themes are big ideas expressed in artworks; an interpretation is a statement about the meaning of an artwork. Students learn how to evaluate whether there is evidence to support a specific interpretation of a work of art and use the theme of place to help them interpret contemporary Chicano murals.

Explain that people often disagree about interpretations because of seeing things from different viewpoints. For example, a parent and a young person might interpret the young person's coming home late from school differently. A parent might interpret the lateness as a chance for the young person to come to harm, as willful disobedience, or even as no big deal. The young person might interpret coming home late as a way to express his or her independence, as a personal decision to take advantage of an unexpected opportunity, or as something he or she won't get caught at and therefore won't be punished for. If the parent and young person share their different interpretations of coming home late, perhaps they can better understand each other's point of view.

Explain further that interpretations are also valuable ways of seeking better understanding in art. Some philosophers of art define interpretation as a thoughtful, informed person's invitation to others to see and understand important things about an artwork (see Marcia Muelder Eaton's "Interpretation and Criticism" in Basic Issues in Aesthetics [Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1988]).

Explain that there can be more than one good interpretation of the same artwork and that some interpretations are better supported than others (that is, there is more evidence for some interpretations than for others). Some support for an interpretation can come from the artwork itself, such as subject matter, visual elements, formal organization, or symbols. Other support for an interpretation can come from relevant information outside the artwork, such as statements by the artist, details about the place and time when the artwork was made, or comments by people who have given the artwork a lot of serious attention.

Display Maynard Dixon'sPalomino Ponies and ask students to look carefully at the mural. List the following interpretations on the board or overhead:

A. Palomino Ponies expresses an idealized vision of California's past.
B. Palomino Ponies is about the cruelty of horse racing.
C. Palomino Ponies is about the idea of freedom and opportunity in California.
D. Palomino Ponies expresses the traditional role of palomino horses in California parades and celebrations.

If you have not already introduced this mural in an earlier lesson, explain that Palomino Ponies was painted in a post office in the Los Angeles area in 1942 by a European American artist who was born in California in 1875. Explain also that the mural was paid for by the federal government as part of a project whose goals included employing artists, promoting social reform, and expressing local pride.

Read through the four interpretations (A-D) above and pose the following questions:

- What evidence supports interpretation A? B? C? D?
- Is there a part of interpretation A for which you can find no support? B? C? D? What part?
- Which are the two strongest interpretations of Palomino Ponies?
- Which two interpretations of Palomino Ponies have the least support?

Explain that interpretations A and C are stronger interpretations than B and D. Interpretations A, C, and D are all consistent with the local pride aspect of the federal painting project.

- Interpretation A is supported by Dixon's idealistic painting of the horses as dreamlike and elegant, even perfect.
- Interpretation C is supported by Dixon's depiction of seven of the eight horses running in an unfenced landscape without harnesses or saddles, which can be seen as a symbol of freedom.
- Interpretation B is a weak interpretation because it goes into specifics that are not connected to the painting. Even though the horses in Palomino Ponies are running, there is nothing to indicate that they are in any way involved with the

sport of horse racing.

- Interpretation D also proposes specifics (parades and celebrations) for which there is no evidence in the painting.

Close this activity by asking for oral or written responses to the following two questions:

- What is an interpretation?
- Why are some interpretations stronger than others?

Basic Activity: Part II
Using a Theme for Interpretation

Explain to students that themes are big ideas that we can use to help us understand what artworks are about. Themes are bigger ideas than subject matter. Whereas the subject matter of artworks might include water, people, animals, landscapes, the rain forest, lovers, and religion, some examples of themes might be nature, friendship, justice, deception, and spirituality. Artists use themes to help unify their artworks. Some complex artworks can have more than one theme. Explain that identifying themes is a way to begin interpreting an artwork.

Overview reminder:
Students are introduced to the concept of themes and interpretation. Themes are big ideas expressed in artworks; an interpretation is a statement about the meaning of an artwork. Students learn how to evaluate whether there is evidence to support a specific interpretation of a work of art and use the theme of place to help them interpret contemporary Chicano murals.

Tell students that the theme of place has been used by a number of artists in their works. Explain that if we think of this concept as a big idea, or theme, it can apply to many different types of places, such as a physical place, a place within a group of people, or even a place in time. (This is a review of information introduced in the My Place lesson.)

Display the four Chicano murals from the Los Angeles area, identifying each by artist, title, date, medium, size, and location:

- Judith Baca's Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine, 1983 (whole mural 1976-83), acrylic, 13 x 35 ft. (whole mural 13 x 2,235 ft.), Tujunga Wash, San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles
- Yreina Cervántez's La Ofrenda (The Offering), 1989, acrylic, 16 x 52 ft.,Toluca Street under the First Street Bridge, Los Angeles
- Frank Romero's Going to the Olympics, 1984, acrylic, 22 x 103 ft., 101 Freeway, Los Angeles
- George Yepes's Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside),1989, acrylic, 23 x 11 ft., 418 S. Pecan Street, Los Angeles

Divide your class into groups of four to six students and assign one mural to each group. Provide each group with a packet of information about the mural and a copy of the Group Interpretation worksheet.

Ask students to use the theme of place to help them interpret their assigned mural. Explain that each group should:

- select or write its own interpretation of the mural,
- gather information to support this interpretation, and
- prepare an oral report of the group's interpretation for the class.

As each group presents its report, and ask the other students to:

- listen carefully, looking at the mural as directed by the group,
- add their own ideas that support the group's interpretation, and
- ask questions or suggest alternative interpretations.

Conclude the lesson by reminding students that in the next lesson they will be working in groups to plan and execute a mural expressing a theme. Their murals will relate to their shared ideas about their own place in the world.

Use attached Assessment if desired.

Group Interpretation Worksheet

Class______________ Names: ___________________

Date __________ ____________________

Artist Name ___________________ ____________________

Mural Title _____________________ ____________________

Work with your classmates to prepare a report on your mural. Select a student to read through the 12 parts of this activity and keep the group focused on its tasks. Select another student to fill in the blanks above and to write down your group's responses to questions 7, 8, 10, and 11.

1. Look very carefully at the reproduction of the mural.
2. Name or describe one interesting part or detail of the mural on a Post-it Note. Each individual student should write 3 to 5 notes.
3. Take turns sharing your first impressions of big ideas or themes that you think the mural might be about. Write those theme ideas on Post-it Notes.
4. Consider the title as a source of ideas. Does the title of your mural help you understand it?
5. Divide up the sections of information in the packet about your mural. Each individual student should read through at least one section and write on Post-it Notes reminders about information you find that helps you understand what the mural is about.
6. Read through the nine interpretation sentences below. Notice that each expresses the theme of place in a different way. Circle the letter of any interpretation(s) that your group thinks may be relevant to your mural.

    A. This mural is about a family's place within a neighborhood.

    B. This mural shows how a person's place can be seen as mobile.

    C. This mural is about a person's place in history.

    D. This mural shows how nationality can define one's place in the world.

E. This mural shows how certain activities are characteristic of certain places.

F. This mural is about how special places can be torn apart.

G. This mural expresses the idea that a person's place within a family is important.

H. This mural expresses how religion can help some people understand their place among others of the same religion.

I. This mural expresses a vision of unity among people from many places.

7. What else do you think the mural is about? Does it express other big ideas or themes? List other themes you find here:

8. You may want to write your own interpretation of the mural based on additional themes you have found. Here are some ways you can start your own interpretation sentence:

- This mural is about

  ____

  ____

- This mural expresses the idea that

  ____

  ____

- This mural shows

  ____

  ____

- This mural tells us that

____

____

9. Match your Post-it Notes with interpretations A-I or with your own interpretation(s) (#8 above).

10. Read through all the Post-it Notes you've grouped with each interpretation. Decide which interpretation you can best support with evidence from the mural and/or with other relevant evidence. You may choose to rephrase the interpretation. Write your final interpretation here.

____

____

11. List supporting evidence for your interpretation here:

12. Prepare a group report. Decide who in your group will:

- display the mural during your report;
- identify the mural by artist, title, date, medium, size, and location;
- read your group's interpretation sentence;
- point to parts of the mural and explain how they support your group's interpretation; and
- report other evidence (outside the artwork) that supports your group's interpretation.

Optional Activity
Interpretation Activity for Beginning or Younger Students

You may want to interpret just one or two of the Chicano murals with the entire class. The Romero and Baca murals make an interesting pair to interpret and compare because they both relate to freeways, something with which most children in the Los Angeles area are familiar. Attached are samples of students' initial interpretations.

Display the Romero mural and ask students to look at it very carefully. Do not share the title of the mural.

Overview reminder:
Students are introduced to the concept of themes and interpretation. Themes are big ideas expressed in artworks; an interpretation is a statement about the meaning of an artwork. Students learn how to evaluate whether there is evidence to support a specific interpretation of a work of art and use the theme of place to help them interpret contemporary Chicano murals.

Ask students to:

- find interesting parts or details in the mural,
- point to those parts or details, and
- name or describe them.

Ask students what they think the mural is about.

- What is happening in the mural?
- What is its message?
- What is a possible title for the mural?

Read the actual title of the mural and present information you have selected to share with your students.

Ask students whether the new information you've shared helps them better understand the mural. If so, ask them to explain how.

Using the board or a transparency, introduce the following interpretations that all include the theme of place. Ask students to select any they think is relevant to the Romero mural.

A. Going to the Olympics shows that people in some areas move around from place to place.
B. Going to the Olympics tells us that a special place can be torn apart.
C. Going to the Olympics expresses the idea that people from many places around the world should learn to live together.
D. Going to the Olympics shows that people enjoy the landscape and plants in a place that is important to them.
E. Going to the Olympics says that people have their own place within their family.

You may want your students to write their own interpretation of the Romero mural. Here are some ways your students can start their own interpretation sentences:

Going to the Olympics is about ________________________.

Going to the Olympics expresses the idea that ____________________.

Going to the Olympics shows ________________________.

Going to the Olympics tells us that ________________________.

Work with your students to select the interpretation of Romero's mural (A-E above or their own interpretation) that they can best support. Help students match details from the mural and facts from the new information you introduced to their selected interpretation.

You may want to repeat this interpretation process with the Baca mural and information about the mural that you've selected to share. If your students interpret both the Romero and Baca murals, you might continue the discussion by comparing the different meanings of freeways in the two murals. (The freeway is shown as a destructive force in the Baca mural and as a carefree symbol of the good life in Romero's mural.)

Discussion questions might include:

- Are freeways important to you?
- Can freeways mean different things to different people? Why?
- How can a freeway be a symbol of freedom?
- Can a freeway be a barrier?
- What do people think of freeways if they live very near them? If they live further away?

Optional Activity
Discussion of Viewpoints of Insiders and Outsiders

Maynard Dixon, a European American painter from California, painted a mural depicting a scene from the history of Mexican California. We might think of him as having an "insider" view of California but an "outsider" view of Mexican California. Judith Baca and Yreina Cervántez, as Chicana artists, might be seen as having "insider" views of the subjects they depicted in their murals.

Overview reminder:
Students are introduced to the concept of themes and interpretation. Themes are big ideas expressed in artworks; an interpretation is a statement about the meaning of an artwork. Students learn how to evaluate whether there is evidence to support a specific interpretation of a work of art and use the theme of place to help them interpret contemporary Chicano murals.

List some advantages and disadvantages for artists who choose people, events, or ideas from their own culture as subject matter in their art. (Advantages might include familiarity, access to resources, and personal attachment; disadvantages might include lack of objectivity, provincialism, or "preaching to the choir.")

List some advantages and disadvantages for artists who choose people, events, or ideas from another culture as subject matter in their art. (Advantages might include fresh perspective, appreciation of the unfamiliar, and richness achieved by mingling two cultures; disadvantages might include prejudice, stereotyping, or misunderstanding.)

Optional Activity
Coordination with Themes in Language Arts

Overview reminder:
Students are introduced to the concept of themes and interpretation. Themes are big ideas expressed in artworks; an interpretation is a statement about the meaning of an artwork. Students learn how to evaluate whether there is evidence to support a specific interpretation of a work of art and use the theme of place to help them interpret contemporary Chicano murals.

Students may be familiar with the words theme and topic from their language arts classes. You may want to review how those terms are used in writing and in literature. Explain that topic sentences help unify paragraphs and that all the sections in a theme paper are held together by relating to a single theme, or big idea.

If you teach language arts, you might ask students to write theme papers that address one of the interpretations from the Group Interpretation worksheet, one from the Interpretation Activity for Beginning or Younger Students, or one that students may have developed themselves. If you do not teach language arts, you might discuss with the language arts teacher the possibility of such a theme paper assignment based on murals.

If you plan to continue and teach A Mural with a Theme, you might consider asking students to write a theme paper or a paragraph focusing on their ideas about their own place in the world.

See attached samples of student poems inspired by the Prometheus myth and Orozco mural.

Mexican American Murals

A Mural with a Theme

Lesson Overview

Students analyze how Chicano and other mural artists have organized parts within their murals. Class members then experiment by placing shapes in various arrangements within different formats. Groups of students plan and execute murals expressing their ideas about their shared place in the world.

Samples of student work can be found at
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Murals/Theme/student.html

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Objectives

Students:

1. analyze how artists have placed parts within their artworks (art criticism)
2. experiment with alternative formats and placements of parts within an artwork (art making)
3. contribute ideas and images to the development of a group artwork (art making)
4. work together to organize parts into an effective visual organization (art making)
5. articulate the theme of their artwork (Our Place in the World) in their own words (art making/art criticism)

See attached Assessment Guides that can be used to determine the level of mastery your students have achieved in reaching these objectives.

Preparation

Read through the lesson plan and optional activities, making adaptations for your own teaching style, your particular students, and the availability of computer equipment and facilities. Assemble necessary resources. Review the vocabulary list.

This lesson asks students to make a temporary mural for display in the art classroom or around the school. You might plan in advance for exhibition spaces in the school or arrange for alternative temporary exhibition spaces within the community, such as rest homes, pizza places, fast food restaurants, supermarkets, malls, or city hall.

Processes involved in planning for a permanent mural are much more complex. Information about planning and executing a permanent mural in a public space is attached. Check out a ceramic student mural, a painted mural, samples of middle school placement experiments, and samples of high school placement experiments at http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Murals/Theme/student.html#canyon

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Time Requirements

Teachers who have field-tested this lesson report that it takes varying lengths of time-often several class sessions-depending on their teaching style, the age of the students, and available resources. If you choose the permanent mural option, you will need to schedule considerably more time and will probably want to broaden the visual-planning concerns to include color, scale, balance, etc.

There are two separate but coordinated activities within this lesson. Decide how many sessions will be required to teach these two activities and then decide whether you want to plan additional sessions for any of the proposed optional activities.

Activities: A Mural with a Theme

Basic Activities

- Part I: Analysis of Parts within a Format
- Part II: Group Mural

Optional Activities

- Mural Activity
- Visual Diagramming
- Experimentation with Placement

Permanent Mural

If you decide to undertake making a permanent mural within or outside the school, considerably more preparation is required. Solicit the wishes and opinions of teachers and administrators and take into account their ideas as you and your students plan a mural. This may be especially important for teachers and administrators whose workspace the mural will be near. You may want to collaborate with those teachers and administrators, asking your students to think of them as patrons. Also, consult custodians and administrators about access and storage of equipment, cleanup, and fire regulations.

For murals outside the school, sensitivity to community interests is equally vital. Students might get involved with the bureaucracy of mural making by contacting owners of the space where they want to put the mural, contacting community members and explaining the mural to them, and creating an opening event (for press, parents, school officials, other students, etc.).

You may need to plan extra time and resources for preparing the wall before painting. Different supplies, such as graffiti-proof paint or even ceramic materials may be used.

See Permanent Murals: Advice from an Experienced High School Teacher for practical, detailed advice from an experienced high school teacher.

Permanent Murals: Advice from an Experienced High School Teacher

by Patricia Johnson
North Canyon High School
Paradise Valley School District
Phoenix, Arizona

Introduction

Designing and producing a successful wall mural is not easy. With my students, I have created many wall murals and through trial and error have discovered some important tips that can make mural making a pleasant experience instead of a nightmare.

Before beginning, your administrator must be 100% behind you and aware that a large mural can take two weeks and perhaps one weekend day. You may also need a substitute day if you do not want to do a lot of after-school work.

Selecting a Painting Style

The mural-making project should be student directed and something they will feel good about and want to participate in. I stay with a simple, bold design, using shapes as the main visual element. This can be elaborated through layering of shapes: large areas first, then smaller and smaller shapes, and finally details. An extremely detailed design means that only a few highly talented students will be able to paint the mural, thereby limiting the group experience. I stay away from portraits because I don't feel high school students can paint them effectively. If they are not well executed, you are opening the door for defacement.

Design Phase

I introduced students to the work of Diego Rivera and Keith Haring as examples of artists who have used the walls around them to express ideas about their culture. I selected Haring's style as an appropriate model for the students' work.

I began instruction by leading a brainstorming session with students on the theme of many cultures working together in a positive way to make our high school a better place-thinking about ideas to express unity, respect, and understanding.

Students each developed their own design for the mural. They then worked together to discuss, assess, and sometimes combine ideas from several designs. The principal, students, and teachers chose the final design.

- Before you start with the design, measure your space. Ours was 9 feet high and 54 feet long, around a corner.
- Always create your design plans on paper with the same proportions as the wall. In our case the design size was 4 1/2 inches high by 27 inches long.
- Check for any design problems, such as doors, air conditioning grids, fire alarms, etc. Measure and mark those on the design paper. You don't want an important part of the design to fall in a problem area.

Teacher Preparation

- Check water source and storage spaces. You cannot leave open paint out in a hallway between classes, a possible recipe for disaster.
- If the storage space is a custodian's room, acquire a key. The custodian may not be able to get there when he or she is needed.
- You may want to plan to rope off the area. Roping off half the width of the hallway is enough space for students to walk past and stay away from the mural.
- Acquire ladders, old chairs, and a rolling cart for paint storage.
- Check to see if a substitute is available for you to be free to be on the site at all times, or whether students will be excused from class to paint.
- Order paint (I use house paint); plenty of large, medium, and small brushes; masking tape; a metal measuring tape; a carpenter's snap line; large and small rollers; large and small paint containers; paper cups; masking paper; and plastic sheeting to cover the floor.

Transferring Design Phase

- Make two color copies of the final design plan, not altering the scale.
- Mark both copies into a grid. I marked off 8 equal-sized sections from right to left and then folded the design plan horizontally to produce 16 equal sections. I labeled each section with a number from 1 to 16.
- We went to the wall and three students divided the 9 by 54 foot mural area into 16 equal sections, using the carpenter's snap line. They labeled each section corresponding with the section number on the design plan.
- I then cut up one of the design plans into 16 sections and mounted the other (also gridded) onto an illustration board for reference.
- I chose three of my classes and assigned three students to a section. They enlarged the design section onto the wall. Each class worked on a section, refining the previous class' work. It soon became obvious which students excelled at this task. The next day only those students continued to transfer the design onto the wall. Through much erasing and redoing, the design was successfully transferred. The process took about a week. We drew only basic

information. Details were left out. They can be redrawn over an initial coat of paint.

- After the design was accurately transferred, student aides rolled out the plastic sheeting, roped off the painting area, located ladders and chairs, and loaded all paint onto the cart.
- At this time I sent out a brief announcement informing teachers of what was happening and personally spoke to teachers whose rooms would be most affected.
- Student aides taped off the ceiling and molding with masking tape.

The Painting Phase

- The first class of 30 beginning students wheeled the cart to the mural site.
- The students were assigned different tasks. Artistically skilled students had more complex jobs. Some students were just the paint can holders. No one seemed to mind. Everyone felt part of the process.
- The students first used rollers to paint the large areas with basic, bold colors. In one day all the basic painting was complete.
- On the second day the advanced classes worked on developing the more detailed parts of the mural.
- On the third day about 15 students from each class painted, while a substitute supervised my remaining students.
- On Saturday about 12 students came in for about 6 hours to do all the remaining work.
- The next week only about 4 students worked on final touch-ups.

Cleanup

- Students tend to be irresponsible with brush cleanup. I kept track of brushes and put them in a bucket of water and cleaned them with water.
- We used a lot of masking tape to make straight lines, which always ended up on the floor. Someone needs to serve on constant cleanup duty.

Preservation

- In the summer after the mural was completed it was touched up.
- The custodian rolled on a protective coat of polyurethane, so that the mural can be cleaned with a strong cleaner.

Mexican American Murals

A Mural with a Theme

Assessment Guides

Use the guide below to assess group presentations of the analysis of Chicano murals as well as each group's analysis of other groups' murals.

> Beginner: Students can point to important parts within an artwork.
>
> Competent: Students can point to important parts within an artwork and describe the artwork's format.
>
> Advanced: Students can point to important parts within an artwork, describe the artwork's format, and describe the placement of important parts within an artwork.

Use the guide below to assess students' murals and their statements about those murals.

> Beginner: Students can incorporate their own ideas into an artwork.
>
> Competent: Students can incorporate their own ideas into an artwork and work with others to organize parts within that artwork.
>
> Advanced: Students can incorporate their own ideas into an artwork and work with others to organize parts within that artwork to effectively convey a theme that others can recognize.

Computer Equipment and Facilities

The A Mural with a Theme activities can be valuable to you as a teacher even if you don't have Internet access in your classroom. Read through the lesson plan for ideas you can adapt for use in your classroom. Each lesson has its own minimal and optimal computer requirements.

Minimal Computer Requirements

Make color printouts or printouts on overhead transparencies of key images linked within the activities section of the lesson plan. Check Electronic and Other Resources for additional Web sites from which you might want to consider printing out information to supplement your instruction.

Optimal Computer Requirements

If you have Internet-connected computer-display facilities, you may want to bookmark key images before class. Determine which links you will utilize during the lesson and how you will present the images and information to your students.

A Mural with a Theme

Resources

- Two copies of the Organizing Parts within a Format worksheet for each mural-making group
- One copy of the Images of Our Place in the World worksheet for each mural-making group
- One copy of the Title of Our Mural worksheet for each mural-making group
- Multiple color printouts of the Baca, Cervántez, Romero, Yepes, Bonampak, Orozco, and Dixon murals or Internet-connected computer-display facilities.
- Newsprint
- Drawing pencils
- Selected mural supplies such as: tempera or acrylic paints, brushes, and water containers or large sheets of colored construction paper, scissors, and white glue
- Rolls of colored craft paper

Optional Resources

- My Place collages
- Masking tape
- Rulers and yardsticks
- Graffiti-proof paint
- Ceramic supplies
- Overhead projector, transparencies, and transparency markers
- Opaque projector

A Mural with a Theme

Organizing Parts within a Format

Class______________ Names: ________________

Date __________ ______________________

Artist Name _________________ ______________________

Mural Title __________________ ______________________

Work together to analyze the mural. Select one student to record your ideas.

1. Make a sketch of the format of the mural.

2. Name and describe the format of the mural.

   ____

   ____

3. Review the title of the mural and think about what you think the mural is about. Does the artist's choice of format contribute in some way to the meaning of the mural? Explain.

   ____

   ____

   ____

4. List the most important parts in the artwork.

____

____

____

____

____

____

5. Are some parts bigger than others or are all pretty much the same size? Explain.

____

____

____

6. List the darkest parts.

____

____

____

____

7. Did the artist use many different colors or just a few?___ ______________

8. Identify any center of interest (focal point) and explain why it stands out.

____

____

____

9. Did the artist repeat parts? If so, in a regular or irregular pattern?

____

10. How does the placement of parts within the mural contribute to the meaning of the work? Explain.

____

____

____

11. How might the artist have placed the parts differently is she or he had chosen a different format?

____

Prepare to present your analysis to the class. Decide who will:

- Display the mural.
- Identify the mural by artist, title, date, medium, size, and location.
- Describe the format of the mural and explain how it contributes to the meaning of the mural, if you conclude that it does.
- Analyze the placement of parts within the mural.
- Explain how the placement of parts within the mural contributes to the meaning of the mural.

Mexican American Murals

A Mural with a Theme

Images of Our Place in the World

Names:

____

____

Class: ________________

Date:________________

Use this worksheet to collect ideas for your mural.

1. List cultural roots represented in your group.

   ____

   ____

   ____

2. List important people you might consider showing in your mural.

   ____

   ____

3. List dramatic events that you might want to depict in your mural.

   ____

   ____

4. List any religious, spiritual, or mythological references that you think might be appropriate to use in your mural.

   ____

5. List the advantages and disadvantages of making a realistic mural.

____

____

6. List the advantages and disadvantages of making a simplified mural.

____

____

7. List ideas you might use that are borrowed from the Baca, Cervántez, Romero, Yepes, Bonampak, Orozco, or Dixon murals.

____

____

8. If you did the Influences from the Past lesson, from what other art influences might you want to borrow ideas for your mural?

____

____

9. If you have a My Place collage, look at all the collages made by students in your group and list ideas you might borrow for your group collage.

____

____

10. While always focusing on expressing the general theme of Images of Our Place in the World, brainstorm about other themes or big ideas which you might use to help unify your mural and make it your own. List some other possible themes.

____

____

____

____

Each student should make a sketch of his or her ideas for the mural. Examine everyone's sketched ideas and make a group decision about how to begin your mural.

Title of Our Mural Worksheet

Title of Our Mural:

____

Our Names:

____

____

Our Statement about Our Mural*

____

____

____

We chose a ______________________________ format because

____

____

____

We chose to organize parts within our mural as we did because

____

____

____

____

*Alternative statement starters include:

- Our neighborhood is a place where...
- Los Angeles is a place where...
- In our neighborhood we...
- In Los Angeles we...
- Our mural is about...
- Our mural expresses...
- Our mural makes a statement about...
- My town is a place where...
- My community is a place where...

A Mural with a Theme

Vocabulary

You may want to introduce the following vocabulary in conjunction with this lesson:

- advantage
- alternative
- background
- center of interest
- complex
- cultural roots
- disadvantage
- dramatic events
- format
- grid
- headdresses
- heir irregular
- mythological
- organization
- pairs
- placement
- preliminary
- proportion
- thumbnail sketch

Kindergarten or first-grade teachers may want to introduce these words:

- triangular
- diamond
- diagonal

Basic Activities: Part I
Analysis of Parts Within a Format

Discuss with students the idea that a set of parts can be organized in different ways to produce quite different effects. Mention, for example:

- toy blocks
- parts of an erector set
- flowers in a bouquet
- tableware in a place setting
- sections of hair in a hairdo
- players on a soccer field or basketball court
- elements in a chemical compound
- elected officials in a government

Overview reminder:
Students analyze how Chicano and other mural artists have organized parts within their murals. Class members then experiment by placing shapes in various arrangements within different formats. Groups of students plan and execute murals expressing their ideas about their shared place in the world.

Explain that a major task in making an artwork is deciding how to place all of its parts. Stress that there are always many choices and possibilities.

Explain further that a very important decision in organizing a two-dimensional artwork is selecting its format or outside shape. If your students made a collage in the My Place lesson, review how they selected formats and carefully placed parts within that format.

Distribute copies of the Organizing Parts within a Format worksheet and display Frank Romero's Going to the Olympics. Show how the parts are placed within the artwork by addressing the questions on the worksheet.

Ask students to imagine how the artwork would have looked if the artist had made other choices about how to place the shapes within the format. Imagine how the mural might look:

- if the palm trees or hearts were grouped together in one area,
- if one or two cars faced the other direction,
- if one or two different parts were emphasized by being brighter or duller,
- darker or lighter, larger or smaller, or
- if the parts were all rearranged in a circle, square, or triangle.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Divide your students into groups and assign each a mural (Baca, Cervántez, Yepes, Bonampak, Orozco, and Dixon). Ask students to analyze the mural using the Organizing Parts within a Format worksheet as a guide. If students have difficulty analyzing their murals, ask them to notice the placement of the parts listed below for each mural:

Judith Baca's Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine

- stadium and its rays of light
- three groups of people
- freeway curves
- What if the format were a circle or a triangle?

Yreina Cervántez's La Ofrenda (The Offering)

- Dolores Huerta's portrait
- lightning bolt
- lilies and candles
- top and bottom stripes
- alternating lighter and darker sections both above and within the text band at the bottom of the mural
- What if the format were a square or a vertical rectangle?

George Yepes's Mujer del Este de Los Angeles (Lady of the Eastside)

- forearms and hands
- face
- flags
- gold framing head and elbows
- What if the format were a circle or a triangle?

Unknown Maya Art Maker's/Makers' Presentation of the Heir

- higher placement of man carrying heir on right
- white robes on noblemen
- band of writing (black, linear Mayan glyphs) at the bottom of the mural
- band of figures topped with headdresses and, above them, white rectangles
- upper band with central complex shape flanked by two somewhat smaller complex shapes
- What if the format were a triangle, square, or circle?

José Clemente Orozco's Prometheus

- dark brown band
- middle orange band blending to tan at the top
- triangular spikes of brown and red

- flat diamond shapes formed by arms framing the tilted head
- strong diagonal central figure
- What if the format were a square or a circle?

Maynard Dixon's Palomino Ponies

- background blue and tan areas
- darker rider and saddle
- purple-gray shadows on the ground
- horses, especially the top, central horse
- What if the format were three times as long or a circle?

After the groups have completed their analyses, ask them to choose a spokesperson to describe the format the painter selected and then to explain how the artist has placed parts within that format.

Explain to students that as they go on to plan and execute their own murals, they'll need to be making their own decisions about format and placement of parts. For example, they should consider balance, repetition, center of interest, size, and color.

Basic Activities: Part II
Group Mural

Divide your class into groups of four to six students. You may want to establish some diversity in groups to avoid reinforcing cliques and to guarantee a variety of backgrounds and abilities from which each group can draw ideas. You may also want to establish groups that include students with various abilities that they can bring to the tasks required in planning and executing a mural.

Overview reminder:
Students analyze how Chicano and other mural artists have organized parts within their murals. Class members then experiment by placing shapes in various arrangements within different formats. Groups of students plan and execute murals expressing their ideas about their shared place in the world.

Explain to students that they will be working together in a group to make a mural with the general theme of Our Place in the World. Review with students the idea that a theme is a big idea that helps explain what an artwork is about. Also review the introduction to the Mexican American Murals Unit Theme. Ask students to use the Images of Our Place in the World worksheet to help collect ideas they might use in their mural.

You may want to show students two permanent murals expressing the theme of Images of Our Place in the World made by secondary students:

- a mural at Roosevelt High School in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, made by students working with Paul Botello, a prominent mural painter
- Fee of the Meadow People, painted by seventh-grade students at Estrella Middle School in Phoenix, Arizona, in an honors class taught by Liza Bergman http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Place/Image/meadow.html

You may also want to introduce your students to other Los Angeles area murals as well as to murals from other cultures and eras. See Electronic and Other Resources.

The following steps may be useful in guiding your students' construction of painted or cut-paper murals:

- Work together to select the main people, places, objects, activities, or symbols to be included in the mural.

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- Individually, make thumbnail sketches (or small construction paper collages) placing major agreed-upon parts within various formats.
- Share thumbnail sketches (or collages) within the group. Discuss advantages and disadvantages of each and select a format for the mural.
- Select background color and other major colors for your mural. Note: A unified whole may be more difficult to achieve with many colors than with only a few.
- Cut format from craft paper and continue planning the placement of parts within the format.

Here are several alternative ways to continue planning:

- Make additional, larger, more refined sketches focusing on major shapes, not on details. Note: Be sure to make the dimensions of the sketch in the same proportions as the dimensions of the final mural.
- As groups plan their murals, students can make large preliminary plans on walls using easily removable masking tape. Note: Before trying this technique, confirm that the tape does not leave a residue on the wall.
- Make full-scale newspaper cutouts of major shapes. Experiment by rearranging the shapes.
- Lightly sketch main shapes on craft paper format. Students may use one of several methods for enlarging the sketch onto the craft paper:
- Rule the sketch into a grid of equal-sized squares. Rule the craft paper into the same number of larger squares. Copy each section, square by square.
- Place the sketch under an overhead transparency sheet. Trace the shapes. Use an overhead to project the transparency onto the craft paper.
- Use an opaque projector to enlarge the sketch onto the craft paper.
- Distribute various mural responsibilities among individuals within each group.

With painted murals:

- Who paints which section(s)? Note: If sections are overpainted or are in need of repair, you can cover sections with new craft paper and begin that section again.
- Who mixes and supervises the coordination of colors?
- Who makes revised sketches, if necessary, based on in-process evaluations by the group?
- How is cleanup and storage responsibility shared?

With cut-paper murals:

Students might choose to use cut paper for large color areas of the mural. Another alternative is to build up shapes with small pieces of paper in a mosaic technique.

- Who cuts, places, and glues?
- Who makes revised sketches, if necessary, based on in-process evaluations by the group?

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- How is cleanup and storage responsibility shared?
- Several times as the mural is being made, stop work, sit down, and view the mural in progress, deciding whether alterations or new ideas would be helpful.
- Decide as a group when the mural is complete and ready for others to view.

Distribute new copies of the Organizing Parts within a Format worksheet. Ask each group to use the worksheet to analyze a mural made by another group and to give the completed worksheet to the students who made that mural.

Ask students to consider their classmates' analysis as they complete their own statement about their mural. Ask them to use the Title of Our Mural worksheet as a guide, discussing and completing their statement to be exhibited with their mural.

If there is not room to display all the students' murals with their statements around the school at one time, select a prominent location and mount one mural (with statement) at a time until all have been on public view. Or, arrange for alternative temporary exhibition spaces within the community, such as rest homes, pizza places, fast food restaurants, supermarkets, malls, or city hall.

Teacher Notes: If some of your students are pressured to join gangs, this lesson provides an opportunity to discuss positive alternatives to gang membership. Encourage students to consider the positive achievements that are possible when people work together. In any discussions of particular cultural groups, ask students to avoid stereotypical descriptions people within the groups would find offensive.

Use attached Assessment if desired.

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Optional Activity
Mural Activity

Preparation

Print out a copy of Frank Romero's Going to the Olympics. Cut out the shape of a palm tree, a heart, and several of the cars from that printout. If you have the assistance of an aide or parent or student volunteers, precut multiple copies of each shape from various colors of construction paper. Older students can make shape templates and trace around them tomake copies in the colors they choose.

Overview reminder:
Students analyze how Chicano and other mural artists have organized parts within their murals. Class members then experiment by placing shapes in various arrangements within different formats. Groups of students plan and execute murals expressing their ideas about their shared place in the world.

Using various shades of red, blue, and yellow nine-by-twelve-inch construction paper, precut a variety of formats, including squares, circles, ovals, tall vertical rectangles, long horizontal rectangles, and triangles.

Making Individual Collages

Distribute multiple precut shapes (or a photocopy of the Romero mural from which students can make their own templates).

Ask each student to select one of your precut formats and two or three colors of construction paper to use in making his or her own version of the Romero painting.

You may want to provide students with markers or crayons to decorate their shapes.

Ask students to try placing their shapes in different ways within the format they have selected. When they've discovered an arrangement that they like, they should glue the shapes in place on the format.

Alternative

You might ask each student to design her/his own symbol, make multiples, and place them within a selected format.

Organizing Individual Collages into a Group Mural

Decide how you will display groups of student collages. Either plan to glue individual collages to large pieces of craft paper or to use bulletin boards or bulletin board strips in hallways.

Divide your students into groups according to similar color choices in their collages. Provide each group with a mural format of color-coordinated craft paper. (For example, students who have used lots of green in their collages might be given a large sheet of blue or yellow craft paper.) If you are working on hallway bulletin strips, you may want to prepare long sections of coordinated color paper to use as backgrounds.

Help students work together in groups to organize their individual collages into a large mural on their large sheet of craft paper or on their section of a hallway bulletin strip. Groups of students can gather around their large paper background and experiment with placing individual collages in various ways. You may want to assign one or two students in each group to move the collages, another student to ask their classmates for comments, and another student to call for votes and count hands.

When each group has agreed on the best arrangement, ask them to glue or staple the individual collages to the background format.

Titling the Group Mural

Ask each student to propose a statement about his or her group's mural. Here are some title starters:

- Los Angeles (or our community) is a place where...
- Our neighborhood is a place where...
- In Los Angeles (or our community) we...
- In our neighborhood we...
- My town is a place where...
- My community is a place where...
- In our class we...

Read all the students' statements and ask each group to select one or two statements to display with their mural. Carefully letter or use a computer banner program to make a large strip label to display with each mural.

Optional Activity
Visual Diagramming

Overview reminder:
Students analyze how Chicano and other mural artists have organized parts within their murals. Class members then experiment by placing shapes in various arrangements within different formats. Groups of students plan and execute murals expressing their ideas about their shared place in the world.

As students analyze the placement of parts within a Chicano mural, provide each student with a small photocopy of the assigned mural, tracing paper, a drawing pencil, and colored pencils or crayons as needed. An alternative is to provide students with a transparency and transparency markers so that when their analyses are completed, they can show their diagrams to the class using an overhead projector. Ask each student to select one of the following visual elements to analyze within the assigned mural: As students analyze the placement of parts within a Chicano mural, provide each student with a small photocopy of the assigned mural, tracing paper, a drawing pencil, and colored pencils or crayons as needed. An alternative is to provide students with a transparency and transparency markers so that when their analyses are completed, they can show their diagrams to the class using an overhead projector. Ask each student to select one of the following visual elements to analyze within the assigned mural:

- light, middle-tone, and dark areas
- bright and dull areas
- dominant shapes
- warm and cool colors
- detailed or textured areas versus empty or nontextured areas

Have students trace the important areas and shade, color, or texture the areas to show how the selected visual element is placed within the format.

Mexican American Murals

A Mural with a Theme

Optional Activity
Experimentation with Placement

After students complete their analysis of a mural using the Organizing Parts within a Format worksheet, ask them to experiment with alternative formats. Provide each group with starter ideas for reorganizing their mural and convenient materials such as tracing paper, construction paper, scissors, glue, pencils, markers, and drawing paper.

Overview reminder:
Students analyze how Chicano and other mural artists have organized parts within their murals. Class members then experiment by placing shapes in various arrangements within different formats. Groups of students plan and execute murals expressing their ideas about their shared place in the world.

You can see middle school and high school placement experiments at http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Murals/Theme/student.html

Below are some ways students might alter the mural's format:

Baca Mural
Cut out the stadium and the two people groups within freeway loops. Rearrange parts using alternative light rays from the stadium.

Cervántez Mural
Cut out key parts and arrange them in a square or vertical format.

Yepes Mural
Trim and/or fill in to produce an image within a circular or triangular format.

Bonampak Mural
Make a copy. Cut and paste nobles into a triangular, square, or circular format.

Orozco Mural
Sketch similar shapes below the arched semicircle to make a circle or complete the corners of the arched semicircle to make a horizontal rectangle.

Dixon Mural
Make multiple copies. Cut and paste to form a continuous band three times as long or to form a complete circle.